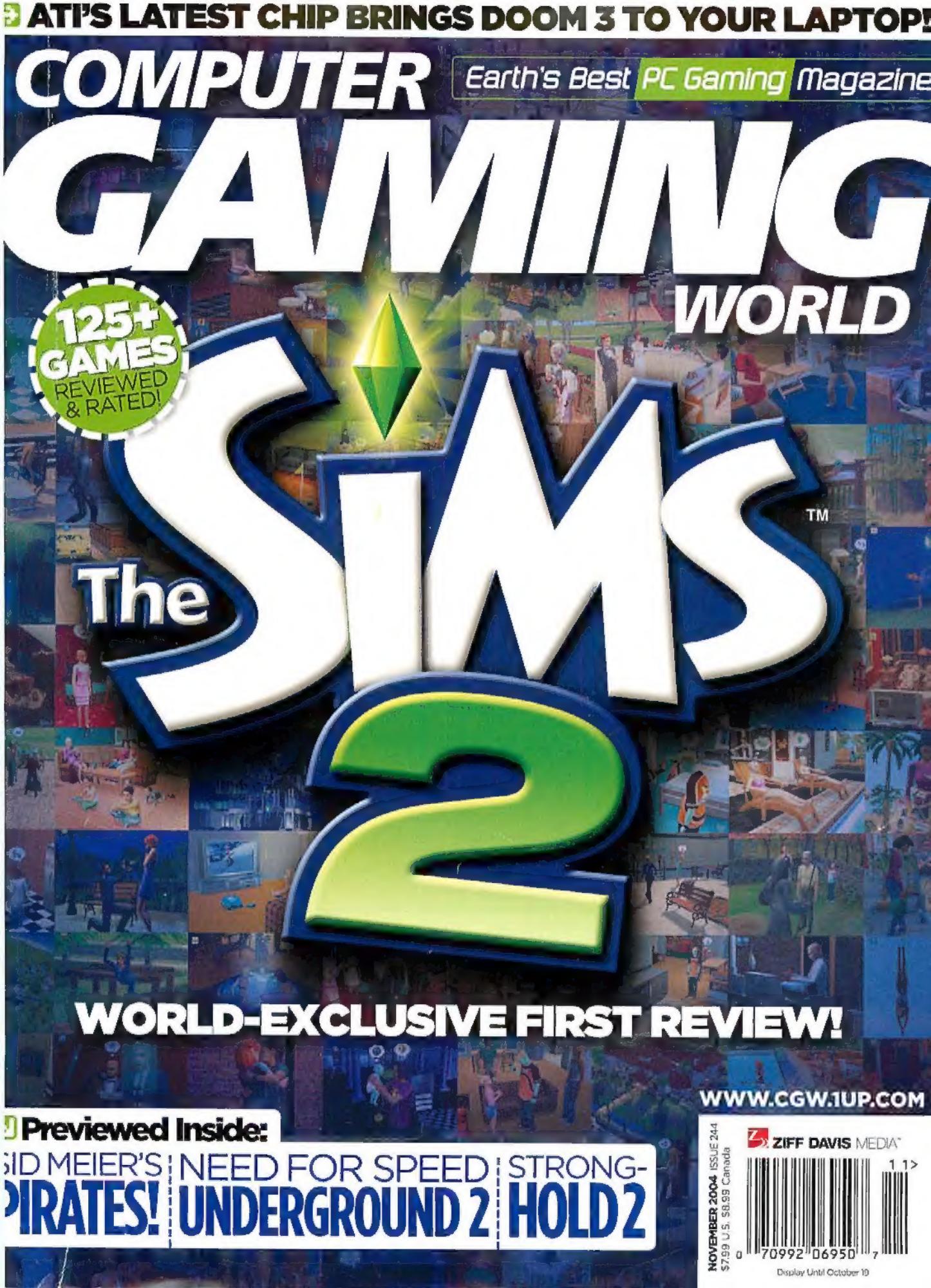


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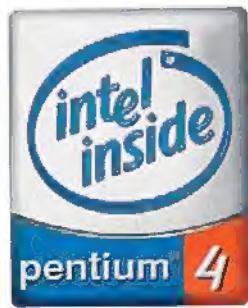
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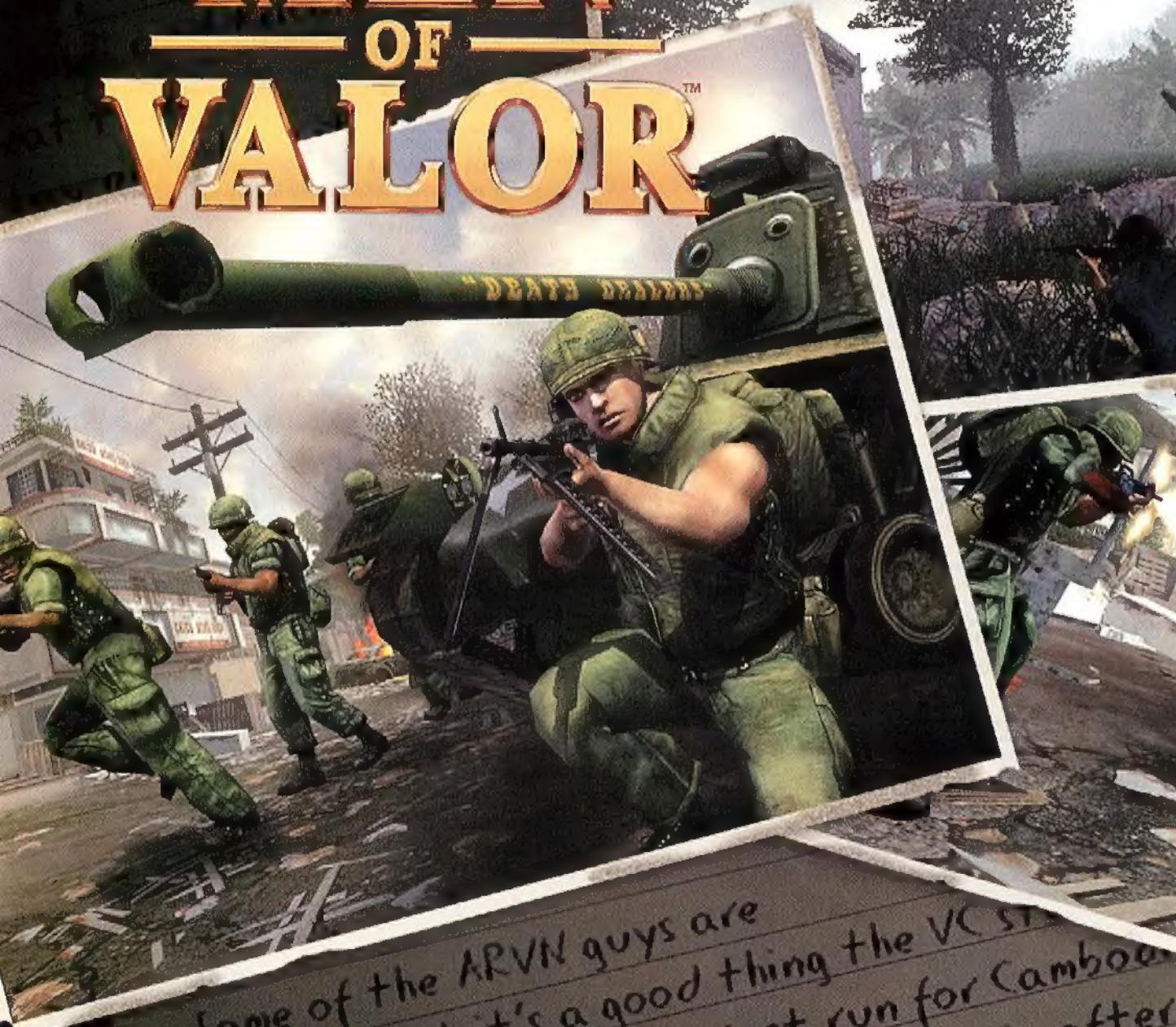


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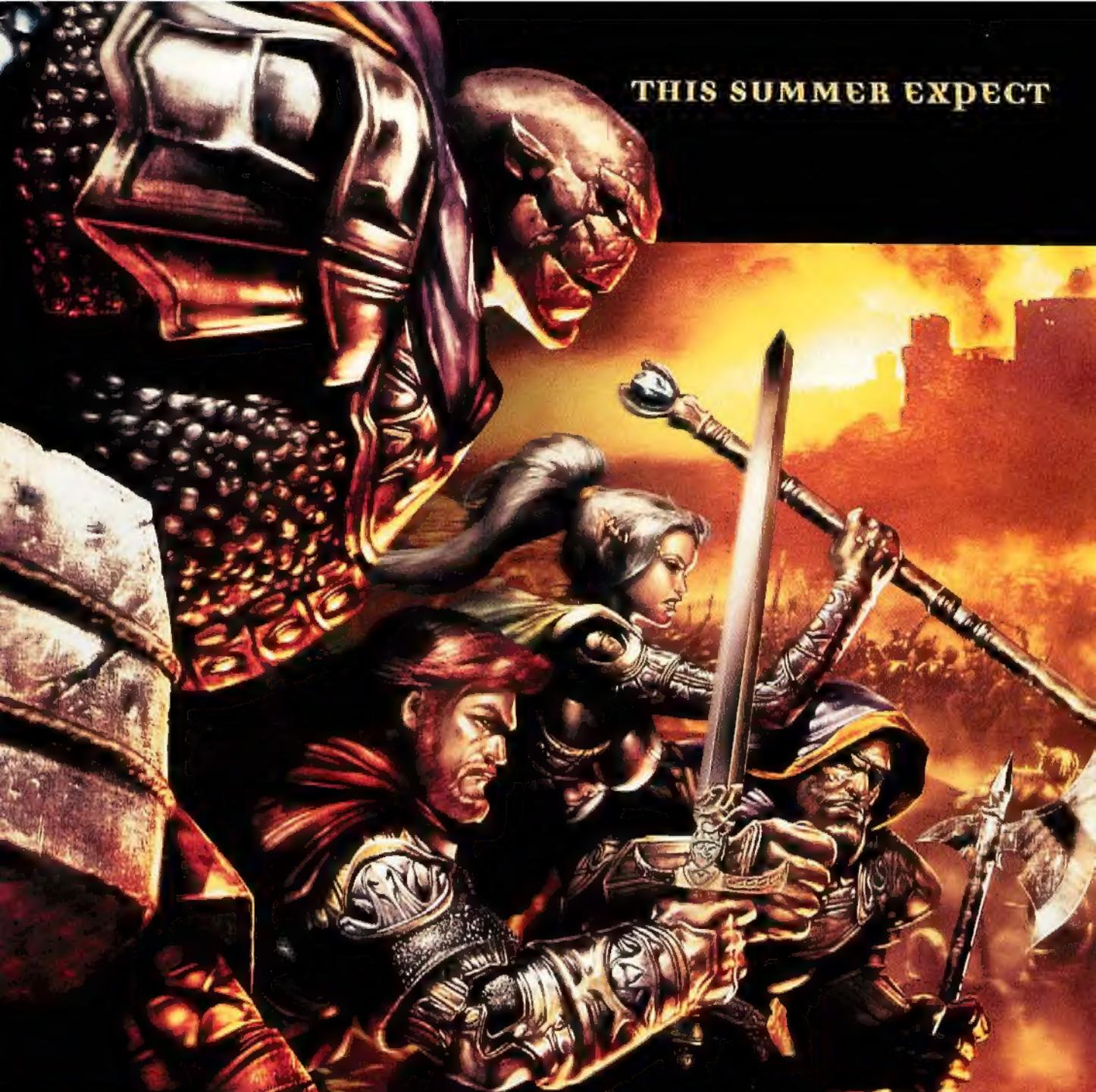


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November 2004 Issue #244

## 16 Editorial

You are not too cool for *The Sims 2*. Get over it.

## 18 Letters

How do you love us? Let us count the ways. Uh-oh. We're stuck at zero.

## 28 Radar

This month, we talk to an overworked game programmer who is suing his employer, we see which games-on-demand services make the grade, and we even try to hook up one of our reporters with a date. And a whole lot more (like a candid AIM chat with the man behind *Neverwinter Nights 2*) awaits you in this month's Radar section. So what are you waiting for?

## 48 Previews

Get ready to set sail with *Sid Meier's Pirates!* and hunker down in the trenches of *Men of Valor*. After that, it's time to play king for a day with *Empire Earth 2*, then it's off to the speedway for some high-adrenaline racing with *NASCAR 2005* and *Need for Speed Underground 2*.

## 76 Reviews

What happens when the biggest game of the month is our cover story? Our Reviews section is stuck with licensed letdowns such as *Spider-Man 2* and *Catwoman*; that's what. Thank goodness for *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* and *The Political Machine*—or we just might have gone insane.

## 89 Tech

In this month's Tech section, we review Voodoo's Envy M-860 laptop, Falcon Northwest's FragBox 2, and Actiontec's 54 Mbps wireless cable/DSL router. We also show you how to install a wireless access point, and just for good measure, there's a new Cracked Case and a new Wi! Power!

## 99 Check Out

We've got a lean, mean Killer Rig for all you budget-minded folks, along with a fresh, new A-List of hardware recommendations. We've also assembled our very own dream cast for the perfect *KOTOR* movie.

## 110 Tom vs. Bruce

Tom, Bruce, and Erik: the F-Troop of the PC gaming industry.

## 114 Scorched Earth

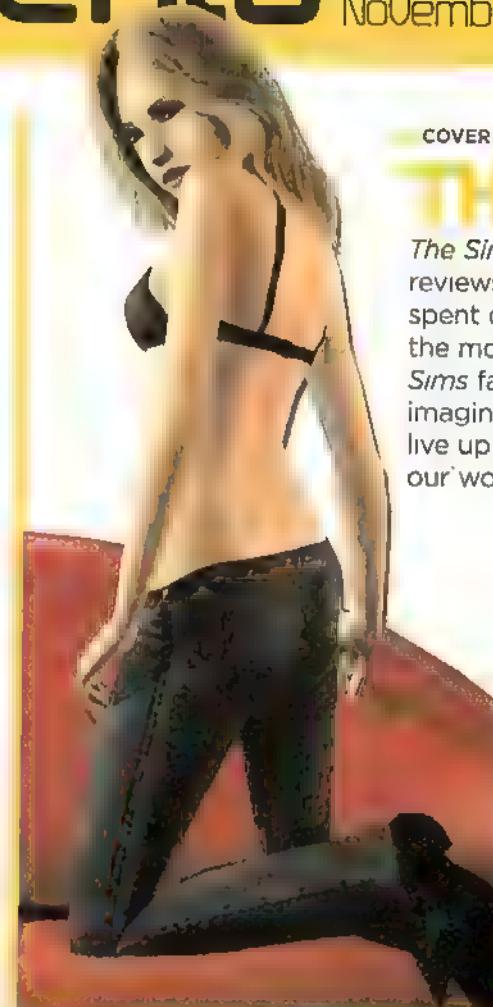
Owie owie owie! It burns!

### COVER STORY

## THE SIMS 2

*The Sims 2* is finally here, and reviews editor Robert Coffey has spent countless hours nurturing the most hideously deformed Sims family you could possibly imagine. Does the final product live up to all the hype? Find out in our world-exclusive first review!

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## PREVIEWS

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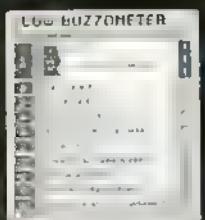
**89**

## THIS MONTH ON 1UP.COM

### CGW.1UP.COM

Doom 3 is this month's titanic chart-topper, closely followed by the ever-delayed Half-Life 2.

We've also got plenty of media for up-and-coming games such as *Battlefield 2*, *The Sims 2*, and *Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth*. And if you're just curious about what's going on in the industry, you'll find up-to-the-minute news about everything from the reportedly leaked *Half-Life 2* script to the recent restructuring at LucasArts.



### CGWJEFF.1UP.COM

On his kinda-sorta-pretty-much-updated-regularly blog, our stalwart commander has a few things to say about being on CNN, not being able to play *The Matrix Online*, and how much *Spider-Man 2* sucks (that's the game, not the movie). Oh, and his interests include "Angelina Jolie." We'll let you draw your own conclusions on that one.



### BOARDS.1UP.COM

This month on the soap opera that is the CGW Magazine Comments message board, plenty of our readers are raving about *Doom 3*, while others are up in arms over the technical terror that is Windows XP Service Pack 2. After you're done with that, hop over to the Gaming Discussion board, where you can vote on our monthly Sound Off poll and drown in a sea of videocard advice threads.

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## >THE BEST GAME COVERAGE

The screenshot shows the 1UP.com homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like HOME, PLAYLISTS, CHANNELS, MEMBER CENTER, GAMES, REVIEWS, NEWS, and SUPPORT. Below the navigation is a search bar and a 'SEARCH' button. The main content area features a large image of a 'Half-Life 2' review with the headline 'Half-Life 2: It's real. It's closer than it's ever been.' Below the review are sections for 'Half-Life 2' reviews, 'Reviews', 'Cheats and Strategies', and 'Media'. To the right of the review, there's a sidebar titled 'Half This Game' with various social sharing options like 'Create a list', 'Message Board', 'Find a Game', 'Add to a Collection', 'Check this Game', 'Add to WishList', 'Add to Watchlist', and 'Delete Your收藏夹 Report'. Further down, there's a section titled 'People Who Own This Game' with several profile cards for users like 'Robert Coffey', 'Bob', 'Loving a Pixel', and 'Kris'. At the bottom left, there's a 'User Hype' section with various user-generated hype entries such as 'dynamite anticipation', 'killed me', 'hilarious', and 'oh my god'. On the right side of the homepage, there's a sidebar for 'Half-Life 2' reviews.

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## >INTERACT WITH OTHER GAMERS

The screenshot shows a user profile for 'Jeff Green'. At the top, there's a banner with the text 'WELCOME TO 1UP' and 'FREE MEMBERSHIP JOIN NOW!' Below the banner, the user's name 'Jeff Green' is displayed with a 'Gamer' badge. To the right, there's a section titled 'Show off your game collection on a My1UP Page!' with a link. The main content area has several sections: 'Recent Updates' (with a link to 'View More'), 'Recent CHAT history' (with a link to 'View More'), and 'Jeff's Games' (with a link to 'View More'). The 'Jeff's Games' section lists various PC games with their IUP Rank, Play Online button, and Report Value link. On the right side of the profile page, there's a sidebar with links for 'Band A Member', 'Add as a Friend', 'Join a Club', 'Edit Account Settings', 'Your Profile & Privacy', and 'Recent Posts'. Below the sidebar, there's a 'Recent Photo' gallery.

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## Welcome back, Bella

**The Sims 2 is here, whether you like it or not**

**JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Just in case the cover didn't quite give it away for you, we have a review of *The Sims 2* inside. Surprise! There was a bit of dissension about doing this cover story by the way, amongst the normally h-ve-minded CGW editorial staff. Why? Because *The Sims* divides gamers that way now. It didn't always, though. As some of you may remember, *The Sims* was a game we all could admit to liking at first. After awhile, however, its popularity swelled to gargantuan proportions.

Becoming a mass ve-hit amongst nongamers—always the kiss of death for any game's geek cred (as if that matters). *The Sims*' endless reign at the top of the bestseller charts, plus the seemingly countless barrage of expansion packs, made it easy to get sick of it. What we forget, though, is the game itself: how unique it was, how funny, how weird, how smart. So now, the official sequel is here at last, and I am here to tell you: friends, do not scoff! Do not be afraid. Do not let some misgivings lead you to be "cool" prevent you from checking this out. Because Maxis has really tipped the ante this time with a reimagining of the gameplay that should surprise even the most jaded. Or, as one bleary-eyed editor put it after yet another sleepless night with this game, "This thing's digtal crack!" It is. Seriously. So give in to it. You have nothing to lose but sleep.



**KRISTEN SALVATORE**  
MANAGING EDITOR  
Aspirations: Leather pants, rock of the lust, pansexual walk-in, whiter and brighter  
Fears: Band-Aids, corner offices, game 7



**ROBERT COFFEY**  
TECH EDITOR  
Aspirations: Tasty sandwich, Pi, Harvey, X-ray vision, my grand-damn pop back  
Fears: Type Daily water dreams, Suicidior



**DARREN GLADSTONE**  
ART DIRECTOR  
Aspirations: Alf, cereal to stay crunchy in milk, a comfortable leisure suit, good Vegas odds  
Fears: Taxation with representation, carries, Robert Coffey



**WILLIAM O'NEAL**  
TECH EDITOR  
Aspirations: New job, new mountain bike, Amanda Beard, a cocktail  
Fears: New job, his wife, parole violation



**JOHNNY LIU**  
PREVIEWS EDITOR  
Aspirations: Job security, home ownership, book deal  
Fears: Being forgotten, roller food, losing my pants



**RYAN SCOTT**  
CD-ROM EDITOR  
Aspirations: That cute chick over at the sandwich place, some cool names to play Detective Comics #27 no lettuce or tomato  
Fears: Spiders, ninjas, angry Kristen



**ROB SCHULTZ**  
ART DIRECTOR  
Aspirations: Good health, level 52 wisdom, respect, wants McD World stamping in  
Fears: Blood, needles, dentist



**MICHAEL JENNINGS**  
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR  
Aspirations: Rocking out, tony dancing, kung fu, lunch  
Fears: Coat hangers, speakerphones, big fish

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Snappy answers to stupid questions



## Nthing Cmprs 2 U

hey, i've been getting ur mag for the last 4 months and i love them. the reviews r good to have before hand when u buy a game and the reviews r good to have to c wut other ppl think of the game. o yeah, i've been wantin to get a new computer lalit cause my parents comp isn't cuttin it (im 14), so i've been readin Wili's reviews on the comps and books and ve got a pretty good idea wut kinda computer i want. but i think gettin 1 of ur guys options on wut kinda comp i should get when i get money for it. i would have emailed wili but i could only find ur email address (at the end of ur "I'm Al Halg" article) ok so the kinda comp i would like would be a school, gaming, programming computer (im gonna be a programmer or something like that after college) thots around 3k. this would be rly hipfull if u could either give ur opion or some! on the staff (like mayb Wili). By the way, i've been looking to be like a beta tester for now but i couldn't find 1 that would pay me (i need money for the computer remember), do u know of ne companies that r coming out with ne games that r paying ppl around my age and up to beta test their games. If so pls could u tell me wut games, their companies and the email address to sign up at

Scot Garcia

We have two suggestions for you, Scot: a computer with a little feature called "spell check" and the immediate rescinding of your school's certification. Seriously, man, even Prince doesn't spell like that anymore.

## Actual meaningful input!

My comment is actually in reply the letter you printed from David Kovacs [Issue #243] and his problem with getting his DOS-based version of *Crusader* to run. If his problem is just that he is running on Windows XP, which can not run DOS-based games, I suggest using a program called AbandonLoader, which, ironically, is the same program I use to run all those

## Child pro quo

**H**ey, you friendly guys at CGW! I was wondering if you guys had a copy of *Neverhood* lying around that you didn't want anymore (in mint condition with the box 'n' all would be awesome, but I'll take anything you got). I have been looking for this game for over two years, but anywhere I find it (eBay, Amazon, etc.) it is too expensive! So would you help me out and send me this awesome game?

Danny

Hey, you friendly reader! We were wondering if you had a 50-dollar bill lying around that you didn't want anymore. We've been looking through our wallets for two seconds but we can't find one! So could you help us out and send this awesome currency?



old adventure games. He should also get VDMSound, which, after installation, works in conjunction with AbandonLoader. Both programs are free and simple to use. AbandonLoader can be found through any common search engine and VDMSound can be found at its official page (<http://ntvdm.cjb.net>)

Ryvn

Thanks for the tip, Ryvn. Now where did we put our copy of *Crusader*?



## No trespassing

I've been a faithful CGW subscriber for the past several years (since '99 or so), I say faithful because I'm not one of those, "I'm canceling my subscription 'cuz your review of [insert game here] SUCKED!!!" No, I've never sent you any sort of correspondence, except to ask Wil for some tech advice. I'm one of those people who quietly enjoys reading your magazine from cover to cover each month, getting advice, chuckling at the jokes, basing my next purchase on what your reviews say.

Anyhow, I'm writing you today to tell you that my wife and I are going to be in San Francisco. While my wife wants to do all of the "wifey" things (wine tasting in Napa Valley, shopping, taking a boat ride, shopping, fine dining, shopping, you get the picture), she has actually allowed me to set aside some time in "our" schedule to do what I want. I think Jeff knows where I'm coming from. After careful consideration, I have come up with one humble request. I was

## Mail Bites

Shrimp and homosexuality—a strange-sounding combination.

—Samuel Silver

Review copies are now available of *Prom on Mars: Volume 1*—the webcomic chronicling the adventures of Liz and the seniors of Liberty High on their way to Mars for their senior prom.

—Anonymous e-mail

# Young Man, Life is No Game!



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D Wondering if my wife and I could either get the nickel tour of your office or even do lunch or happy hour on one of the days we are in town. I know that you probably get requests like this all the time and you have quite a busy schedule so I can appreciate your hesitance to grant my request. And I know that even though I have helped pay your salaries for the past five years or so, I know this only entitles me to my magazine each month. So I can only offer you this: the first round of drinks are on me. Scouts' honor. I really enjoy reading your magazine each month and would like to show my gratitude in person. It would mean a lot to me. OK, enough of the guilt trip :)

Here's a little more info about me, just so you don't think I'm some weirdo: I'm a 31-year-old airline pilot, my wife is an accountant, and we live in Houston, TX. We make a decent living, have no kids, and live in your typical quiet suburbia. While I'm a calm, professional pilot during the day, I bring my laptop with me on my trips and frag the crap outta anyone can online at night. My drugs, err..games of choice are *Battlefield 1942*, *Counter-Strike*, and *UT2004*. While I'm new at *UT2004*, I'd be happy to kick anyone's ass in the other two games if I come over for a visit. :)

**Anonymous**

Sorry, gentle reader, ever since the Pants-Free Visitor episode of 2001, our company lawyers have set down strict guidelines. 1) No visitors. 2) In the event there are visitors, no taking their pants. 3) No taking their shirts, slapping a coolie hat on 'em, then dunking them in icy water. Man, lawyers are just no fun.

### Dam that space-time continuum!

What's wrong with you guys? Now I love the mag and everything about it except one thing...the demos. I mean, they're great, but you send demos, and the game came out 2 months earlier! No one (if it's multi-player) is gonna be playing these anymore. So send it to us when they release the demo, not 2 months later! Thank you.

**Spenser Staebler**

We honestly do our best, Spenser, but a couple of things get in the way of our slapping timelier demos on the CD. First of all there's the whole "our best" issue—that's an effort easily matched by most third-graders. Further, our production schedule dictates that the disc is finished roughly two months prior to your getting it. When you couple that with the fact more and more developers are delivering demos after completing their games, it's hard to make sure the demos reach your home any earlier.

### More demo stuff

Darren and Jeff, representing the most esteemed computer gaming magazine, schlep all the way to Santa Monica at the whim of game-designer egos, and we didn't even rate one teeny, little level of *Doom 3* on the demo CD? What's up with that? Geez

Or am I jumping the gun? Next month—right?

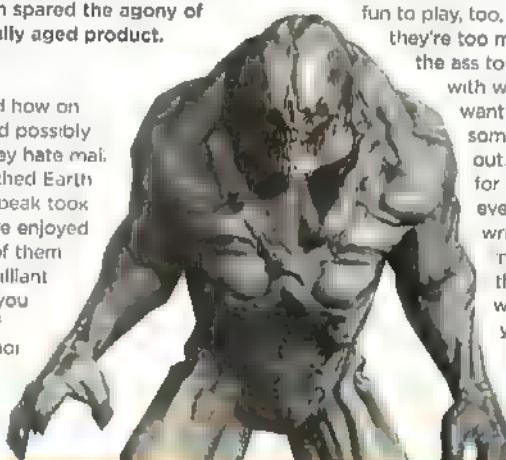
Love you guys!

**Cynthia B.**

We were going to package the entire game with that issue, Cynthia, but then we got Spenser's e-mail and he made us realize that if we couldn't beat *Doom 3*'s release, we just shouldn't bother. Thanks to us, you've been spared the agony of playing a marginally aged product.

### Coffey talk

I don't understand how on earth people could possibly write Robert Coffey hate mail. I've enjoyed *Scorched Earth* ever since Greenspeak took the plunge and I've enjoyed every single one of them. He's certainly a brilliant man, and I guess you need some sort of dark sense of humor to fully appreciate how much he kicks ass.



Regarding the last column about PC games not having the same liveliness as say, playing softball or being a LAN. I fully agree with you. Playing *UT2004* and other assorted online games has really made me realize that while PC games can be great fun online, typically

- 1) You'll never see those people again
- 2) Most of these people have the intelligence of a small banana.

You are once again correct that the only way to truly enjoy PC gaming online is to LAN. I've played *UT* online so many times, but nothing is quite as satisfying as hearing my friend shout from the other side of the room "HOW THE HELL?" Thank you for your time, you are a great man

**Joe Conti**



I just wanted to start by saying I've never written to an editor of a magazine before, but when I read your article about playing games on Easy, I had to make this my first. I just wanted to say that I completely agree with what you said. I'm a 28-year-old female who loves to play games, but there are times when I just want to go in and win, and I'll go in and blow things up on Easy mode. Normal and Hard modes are fun to play, too, but sometimes they're too much of a pain in the ass to want to worry

with when you just want to jump in, kill something and jump out. Thanks again for the article; if everything you write is done as interestingly as this article, I can't wait to see what you have to say next. Keep up the good work

**Aimee Luffman**

## Mail Bites

Either I have the wrong idea of what a review is supposed to be, or certain CGW editors suck at reviewing games.

—Rodel Rufu

Speak the words of wisdom, Robert, but please don't plant those images of Jeff in oversized footie pajamas in my brain again!

—Menneth

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"Easy Does It" is a great article and I fully support your view. Easy is better for those of us that have real lives to live! Thank you I have a younger brother who thinks he's "better" and his life is more meaningful because he frags more people than I do in Counter-Strike.

Again your article hits the spot!

**Lucas Del Castillo**



### And so America's Youth goes down the toilet

Hello, my name is Alex, I am 17 and I have been a dedicated reader for over a year now. I first found out about CGW when I saw a magazine in a barbershop that intrigued me. It had a cover story for an interesting game called *Medal of Honor Allied Assault*. A few months later I bought that World War II shooter, but I still wasn't happy (or geeky) yet. Then I subscribed to CGW and thanks to you, I have no life. While my other friends were at parties having fun, I was slashing orcs while downloading *Desert Combat*. While my other friends were playing sports, I was coaching the Redskins at the Super Bowl against the Cowboys. While my friends were driving their new sports cars, I was stealing them and running from the cops. I remember when all I used to care about were money, girls, and cars. Now, thanks to you, I still care about those things, only pixelated. Your reviews are awesome, Greenspeak blew, Scorched Earth rules (although I need to visit a psychotherapist because of it). But when Scooter and especially Dana left, I locked myself in my room and cried for days. In short, ladies and gentlemen, you have stolen my life, and God bless you for it.

**Alexander Keen**

We're sorry. Really

### Messieurs Pantalons de Smarter

I just wanted to make a comment about last month's [Issue #243] Letter of the Month—you remember, Monsieur Pantalon

de Smarty? Anyway, he remarked that the word "hippopotamus" is derived from Greek words that translate to "water horse." If our Monsieur had really known his Greek, however, he would know that hippopotamus does not mean "water horse" but rather "river horse." A water horse would be a "hydrohippo."

**Larry from Madrid**

In the Sept 2004 issue, there is a factual error in the F.E.A.R. article. Near the end it says, "The graphics are 'per pixel lit,' which means that every single pixel rendered in the game is evaluated for lighting and color—pretty much as detailed as you can possibly go—an effect not possible prior to the arrival of DirectX 9 graphics cards."

This is simply not true. Any shader effect that can be achieved in DirectX 9 can be pulled off in DX8. I know because I've incorporated DX8-specific per pixel lighting into my own indie title and it works just fine. DX9 doesn't really do anything special until you start getting into ps3.0 effects

**Ryan**

Thanks, Ryan. We stand corrected. And very confused.

### Guess who didn't go to prom?

In his review of *Universal Combat* [Issue #243], Erik Wolpaw makes the ridiculous mistake of placing the destruction of the Death Star in the era surrounding the year 3000. However, as any nincompoop knows, the events of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* occurred "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." I hereby revoke your geek licenses

**Andrew Schran**



## Mail Bites

Hello, I would like to present you the House of Cool drunk-en hottest hollywood stars!! :)

—Burritos I. Monogrammed

I would make love to Id if it were a single human...female...um... yeah.

—Sameer S. on 1UP.com



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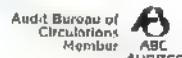
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Proud to be an American? Damn straight, he is. McGee discusses his new games.



Gamer? Do game-on-demand services make the grade? See for yourself in our report.



SWG Gamers need love too. That's why we signed up for a little field test.

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# N

**N**eil Aitken is fed up. Working as a programmer at Vivendi Universal's Knowledge Adventure division since February 2000, Aitken has dealt with a company unwilling to compensate for overtime. Management has forced him to change time cards to reflect fewer hours and even made him cross out weekends entirely. At least, so he claims.

Graves & Associates filed a lawsuit against VU on June 28, citing violation of five California labor codes and one business and profession code. As of press time, VU wouldn't comment. "This was a direct result of watching good friends and fellow programmers be laid off after working extraordinary amounts of overtime," says Aitken. "We were being squeezed to our limits, and those who voiced their dissatisfaction generally got cut."

### OVERWORKED, UNDERPAID

That the case is being filed in California is significant, as California law specifically provides additional protection to computer programmers over federal laws. Employers have to pay their programmers at least \$45.63 an hour or a minimum salary of \$1,200 a week to avoid overtime wages. Federal laws mandate a lower rate.

The suit isn't just fighting for Aitken's overtime, either. If he's successful, all employees under similar circumstances at VU will receive back pay. "We believe that the average programmer is working between 10 and 15 hours a week of overtime. Each programmer is entitled to one-and-a-half times his hourly wage for every hour of overtime since the year 2000," says Allen Graves, Aitken's lawyer.

So, could VU be dishing out millions of dollars? "Not likely," says research analyst and former labor lawyer Michael Pachter. "The one thing that VU did poorly was define job requirements." The gist is that paying hourly wages denotes an essentially replaceable job. Programmers are skilled workers, and it would be smarter to either 1) not let them work overtime if they are hourly or 2) just make them salaried so that there is no issue of overtime pay. Well, either that or just ship jobs off to coders in India who'll work feverishly for a fraction of the price.

Many developers were surprised that Aitken had filed a lawsuit. Most felt that if the work conditions at VU really were that bad, Aitken should have gotten the hell out. As a senior programmer at Bethesda Softworks, Steve Meister has felt the heat of "crunch time" but has come away only with good experiences. "If you don't like the way you're treated at work, try to find work at a company that has more reasonable expectations of its employees," says Meister.

The results of the lawsuit could draw a close eye to the videogame industry, as



Look for Neil as he models his newest fashion line: out-of-work wear.

**"The bigger risk for the publishers is that they'll have to share a bigger piece of the pie. That can translate into higher costs for the game."**

overtime pay, especially in this industry, is largely unregulated and remains so. Last year President Bush increased tensions by threatening to veto a bill with an overtime pay protection guarantee.

### A MATURING INDUSTRY

The upshot is that employees just want overtime handled right. In fact, in a recent "quality of life" survey by the International Game Developers Association, a surprising 46.8 percent of game developers reported that they were not compensated for overtime. Only 4.3 percent mentioned receiving cash recompense, while others got time off, royalties, or profit sharing in exchange. Pachter, however, says that this is where the lawsuit can hit the consumer.

the hardest. "The bigger risk for the publishers is that if [the Aitken case] goes through, they'll have to share a bigger piece of the pie. That can translate into higher costs for a game."

The suit's mere presence is spurring discussions between developers over the nature of the industry and how its workers should be treated. "A curious thing is happening, and the Vivendi suit is a reflection of it," says Sean Hyde-Moyer, a producer at THQ. "The industry is starting to mature."

The suit was filed long before Aitken's last day at the company, August 13, and, he says, "Many people expressed their support." The trial date for Aitken's suit isn't until at least June of next year, but the case will likely be settled before then. ■ Patrick Klepek



HE GOT GAME

# Everybody's All-American

**McGee talks about life after *Alice***

**I**s the height of hubris putting your name in a game's title? Not if you're American McGee. He worked his way up through the ranks at Id Software and helped assemble the *Doom* and *Quake* series. He created *Alice*...sorry, *American McGee's Alice*...a twisted gothic revisiting of Lewis Carroll's classic children's story. He also has some big plans for what's coming next.

#### OVER THE RAINBOW

After the modest success of *Alice*, McGee shopped around the idea of a dark retelling of *The Wizard of Oz*. Atari (then Infogrames) bit at the pitch "We were ahead of schedule and f\*\*\*ing Infogrames pulled out because of their financial problems [in 2003]." They had the game done, a book written, toys for sale, and a film trilogy optioned by legendary überproducer Jerry Bruckheimer. "All of this is put on hold, in limbo, because nobody was willing to take a f\*\*\*ing chance. Sad truth is, that's just the nature of the industry now."

#### GETTING ENLIGHTENED

Well, some people are willing to try something different. McGee was hanging out with Trevor Chan (creator of *Capitalism* and founder of

Enlight Studios) in Hong Kong when the two decided to do some work together. As the creative director of Enlightenment Studios, McGee is shepherding new titles and giving them his stamp of approval. Which brings us to McGee's first assignment: to help put together all the pieces for *American McGee Presents Scrapland*. "When I first saw what [Spanish developer Mercury Steam] created, I knew that I wanted to be involved." As executive producer of the title, he's already got a lot to do on a day-to-day basis. He's working on marketing and, more important, making sure the dialogue is polished and localized. The game does, in fact, show promise. So much so that McGee is already talking to Mercury Steam about working on his next twisted fairy-tale game. He says it's too early to discuss which classic tale will get turned on its ear next, but did say that there are other projects in the works.

The first is a possible MMO version of Oz. At press time, the only official word is that he's talking to a Korean (NCsoft! Cough! Cough!) company about the possibilities. The other is a game tentatively titled *Bad Day L.A.*, a *Medal of Honor*-style first-person shooter that's set in the modern day. Going for some complete goofball slapstick elements, it might even be a little reminiscent of *No One Lives Forever*. McGee promises something "damn funny with a really dark sense of humor." We expect no less. —Damen Gladstone

**"When I first saw [a demo of *Scrapland*], I knew that I wanted to be involved."**

## REALITY CHECK

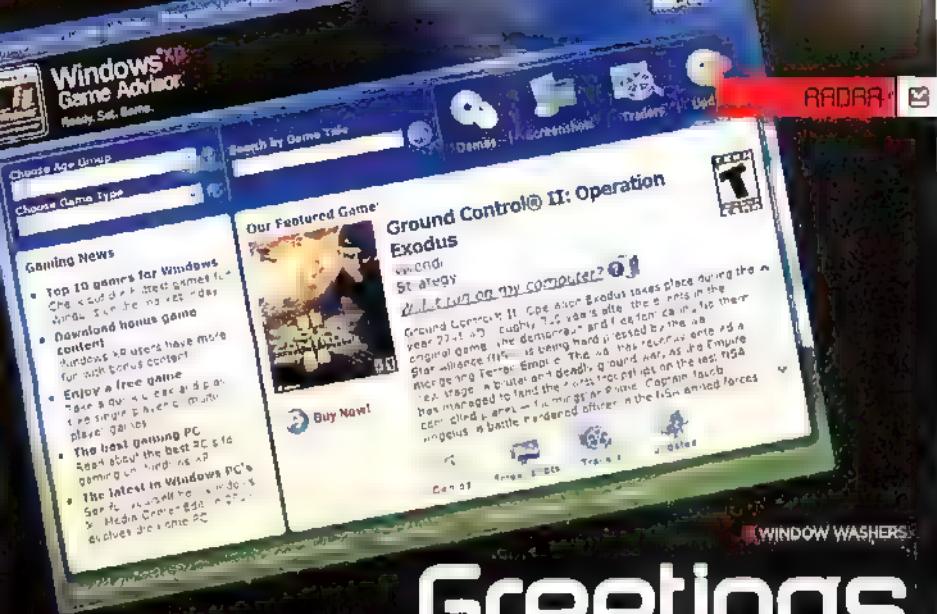
Reality Check compares the ratings of the major gaming press with GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews.

GAME	IGN	EVE	IGN.COM	10KCRITICS	IGN	IGN	IGN
Beyond Good & Evil	C+	C	C	B+	B+	B+	B+
Eye of the Hero	A-	A-	A-	A-	A-	A-	A-
Fighting Fantasy: Caverns of the雪人	C	C	C	B+	D	C	C
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	D	C+	C	C	C	C	C
Warlords: Battlegrounds	B+	B+	B+	B+	G	B+	B+



NEWS  
FEED

» Say hello to my little game. VU is bringing Scarface back from the dead in a GTA-like third-person shooter sometime in 2005. Is it coming to the PC? Maybe, but we wouldn't bet a mound of cocaine on it. »



## GREETINGS from Seattle

CGW wrangles Microsoft conference to find out what the future holds for Windows gaming

**F**or the past few years, Microsoft has held a developer-only event called Meltdown. In many ways, Meltdown is like a mini Game Developers Conference, with the exception being that its focus has always been on creating games for the Windows platform. Meltdown has also been notoriously closed to the press, but with Microsoft's next OS on the way, CGW had to sneak in the back door to Microsoft's headquarters.

If the mantra for Meltdown was "Games for Windows," then the latest version of DirectX, version 9.0c, and the next Windows OS are the keys to this charge. Of course, the next OS is well off. When asked when Microsoft expects to ship it, Chris Donahue, lead technical evangelist for DirectX, stated bluntly, "On Wednesday." Which Wednesday is anyone's guess. Humor aside, according to Microsoft, gaming is one of the first few things that people do in Windows after listening to music and performing other multimedia tasks. To that end, the company touted a few of the features that highlight the next Windows OS' gaming pedigree. For instance, look for a gaming folder that's similar to the My Music and My Pictures folders already in Windows XP. The next OS may also incorporate the Windows XP Game Advisor that is currently available on Microsoft's site. (It's a utility that scans your machine and lets you know if your rig is up to snuff.)

Microsoft is banking on making games both more accessible and simple to use in order to lure more of the already 120 mil-

lion people who have purchased XP into the world of gaming.

Furthermore, the next Windows OS will address many issues—old ones that have plagued PC gaming since its inception, as well as new ones—that serve to make the Windows gaming experience more plug-and-play. Namely, look for parental controls that limit access to games based on things such as ESRB rating. Microsoft is also looking to include features like buddy lists for game matchmaking and Live tools for Windows that will make Windows more like the Xbox Live experience, complete with Gamertags, voice chat, and matchmaking. One of the most anticipated features that we expect to see in the next Windows OS is a game-patching system similar to Windows Updater through which publishers can specify download locations, games will look for patches, and users will be prompted by Windows when a patch is available for a particular game. We've confirmed rumors of "Drop-and-Play" functionality that will be in the next OS or maybe even sooner. One source says some EA games coming out as early as next year (ahem, *Battlefield 2*) may instantly install all the needed files (like on an Xbox), or at least let you more quickly choose where the install goes.

While a lot is still unconfirmed, at least we know that the next OS will launch on a Wednesday—at some point. We'll keep you posted. ■ William O'Neal with additional reporting by Darren Gladstone

### NEWS FEED

» Aces high. Gathering just announced that *Wings of War*, a WWI dog-fighting game, is on for a fall release. »

Get in Touch  
with Your Inner Evil.



SIERRA

TEEN



Comic Mischief  
Suggestive Themes  
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org)

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MAKING THE GRADE

# Report Card Games on Demand

As broadband users increase, is the time finally right?

Continuing our look at what's hot and what's not in computer gaming, we've got a new category to add to our list: Games on Demand. It's a service that lets you download full games over your broadband connection, so you can play them without ever leaving your home. It's a great idea, but it's still in its early stages. Here's what we think about three of the major providers.

## AMERICA ONLINE

**BY CLIFF STONE** So what if AOL has decided to add a new gaming channel (keywords: game) to its service? People still want to play, and right off the bat, AOL is taking steps in the right direction. Spokespeople say that while you can currently download demos, you can also download full commercial games from AOL's partner site, Trymedia ([www.trygames.com](http://www.trygames.com)). The deal works this way: Download a full game, and you'll play for a couple hours before you're asked to pay for it. If you like it, you have the option of buying it or unlocking the full game. Want to burn it onto a CD for backup? No problem! It's your now. This same practice has been done formerly with smaller shareware games, but seeing it employed to larger retail games is a nice change.

**GAMES** The game themselves, well, they're whole other issue. Among the most notable multiplayer games offered are *Grand Theft Auto: Civilization III*, *Monopoly*, and *Meet the Fockers*. While AOL has its work cut out for itself, looking for hot games from the past two years, but the company probably has a few more selling titles in its future.

## COMCAST CABLE

**SERVICE** A relative newcomer to the service world is Comcast. It has recently acquired and merged G4 TechTV into whatever the heck it plans on calling it.

Report Card				STUDENT: Games on Demand	SEMESTER: Fall 2004
PROVIDER	SERVICE GRADE	GAMES GRADE	COMMENTS		
AMERICA ONLINE	B	C-	Good performer, but has trouble making friends.		
COMCAST CABLE	B	B	A very eager student. Shows great signs of improvement.		
YAHOO! GAMES	B+	B+	Good work, keep it up! Don't let your grades start to slip.		

**YAHOO! GAMES** Unlike AOL and Comcast, dealing with full-game purchases, Yahoo! provides a rental service. Instead of buying a full game and streaming it to your PC, you're basically needed to download a game file and then download whitebox media content. No lure how to play in manual is available as well. After the initial download, the results of course are pretty impressive when playing a game. The only real downside: The games don't come with you. If you want to play on the road, you'll need a fast connection to navigate a Web browser to the game you want to play.

**GAMES** Not surprisingly, given its use of Comcast's stable of games, Yahoo! is still early on. Comcast has already made some similar partnerships with Obsidian and Atari for a fairly healthy selection of games. Among some of the notable ones to check out are *Call of Duty: Pandora Tomorrow*, *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*, *Game of the Year Edition 2003*, and *Maya with the Lights*.

## YAHOO! GAMES

**SERVICE** Yahoo! has been around for the longest, and it's resulted in the biggest selection of titles and the smartest value-of-money options. This is why it was so strengthen, a spokesman for school outright refused to participate in our little competition. They assured us that there are no plans to discontinue the service. Demand services built off of public. Undoubtedly, we signed up and found that it was the same old experience. Playing *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfighter* or downloading a streaming game.

**GAMES** How you play is up to you. You'll spend only plan on having three games at a time, it'll run you \$10 bucks a month. Other options include paying \$15 a month for unlimited play, or \$35 for three months at a clip. Yahoo! has also decided that you'll find strength in variety, ranging from *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* to *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords*.

## NEWS FEED

» Psychotic! Tim Schafer's Xbox title *Psychonauts* has been acquired by Majesco. It's now coming to the PC as well. » *Fuller Spectrum Warrior*. It's coming to the PC this fall with sharper graphics and two brand-new missions. »

## CHAT ROOM INTERVIEW

# The AIM Game

FUrqurhart CF77 - Instant Message

File Edit Insert People

FUrqurhart has entered the room.

CGW: welcome to the party. How should I address you, Feargus. Master? Doctor? Esquire?

FUrqurhart: How about Feargus Urquhart

CGW: well, that's a start. Anything shorter?

FUrqurhart: I think so.

CGW: Don't OK. Mr. Mysterious, can you clue us in on Neverwinter Nights 2?

FUrqurhart: We've been working on it for about

CGW: So this is a new engine?

FUrqurhart: No, but it will be a pretty major

CGW: Gosh. What is the biggest change design wise between NWN1 and 2?

FUrqurhart: Our big focus is the single-player

CGW: OK, so we're getting a rockin' story this time around. What else is going to make NWN2 stand out beyond the last game?

FUrqurhart: Well, that's Neverwinter.

CGW: Nice.

FUrqurhart: Neverwinter. Duh.

CGW: Aw, c'mon, I promise I won't tell anyone. I swear.

FUrqurhart:

CGW: Really? You won't have to dig into 10 menus to set A.I. coding routines for henchmen?

FUrqurhart: Yeah, I do.

CGW: Sounds like a much more reasonable setup. Does that mean you're hotkeying commands?

FUrqurhart: I do.

FUrqurhart: Something will go.

CGW: Very cool. I'm definitely looking forward to seeing this in action.

FUrqurhart:

CGW: You're looking to incorporate that end of the MMO world? Any dancing like in *All Goldens?*

FUrqurhart: Well, we ha-

CGW: Never mind.

CGW: I can see it on the box already: 900,000,000 hours.

FUrqurhart: we do want to give the player things to do that are off the main path of the story. It's like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Alien*, *Aliens*, *Blade Runner*.

CGW: Well, I don't want to hog up any more of your time—you've been awesome about this already. But I gotta ask: Anything you can tell us about the plot?

FUrqurhart: Not really, but it is rated R. Nothin' to everyone.

CGW: You know this is for an article, right?

FUrqurhart:

Think this is the whole conversation? Think again! Darren had a great time talking to Feargus. To see the entire hour-long ramble with gaming great Feargus Urquhart, check out [AIMgame.UPG.com](#) right now.

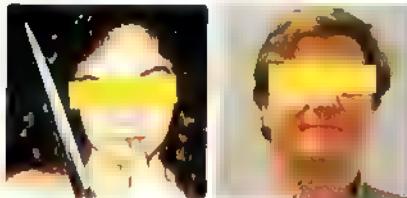
TODAY



NERD LOVE

# Single, White Gamer Seeking Girl...Any Girl

**Looking for game love in all the wrong places**



**A**s a hardcore gamer, it's tough to get a date—that's the embarrassing truth. Enter matchmaker John Villafrate. At 23, he's the founder of MMODating.com, the first online dating service geared specifically toward lonely keyboard jockeys. "Being a gamer, I couldn't see myself replying to someone whose interests were going out to a bar and clubbing every night," he explains.

But don't assume this new dating destination just caters to dorks. "Some people think all gamers live in their mom's basement and only come out dressed as a wood elf, casting level 2 spells on everyone," Villafrate laughs. "Ninety-nine percent are absolutely average people who just love the entertainment that games provide."

With 2,300 presumably "average" people currently registered on MMODating, this single game journalist reveled in the idea of putting the service to the test via a series of three Los Angeles-centric outings. The following is an unadulterated field account—of course, the names of the lovely ladies have been changed to protect the innocent.

#### DATE #1 POLLY MORPHOUS

Historically, people lie about their weight—but never so much as Polly. Trying to channel conversation topics while munching on a Cheesecake Factory sandwich, I couldn't help but wonder how her dangerously swaying arm flap equated to an "athletic and toned" descriptor. Sure, she was per-

fectly nice, but she had an unhealthy liking of all things reality—*Cops*, *Springer*, you name it—which struck me as the perfect "check please" cue.

#### DATE #2 TOO-TALL TINA

Being 6' 3", it's not often I meet a lady who can stand tall next to me—but Tina was the exception. She nearly matched my skinny-ass proportions, too, making for more of an awkward brother-sister pairing than a sexy one. But that didn't hinder our talks about mods, her urges to toggle her joypads in the nude sometimes, and her adorably vicious Chihuahua (apparently, it bit a boy's crotch once but then whimpered apologetically). At some point, she slipped me her number—and some tongue.

#### DATE #3 LITTLE ASIAN ANNIE

I wouldn't call it a fetish, but it's certainly difficult to broom a cute Asian girl to the curb. Luckily, Annie was much more honest in her posting than Polly—even admitting to being a "bit of a perv" (let's not go there). At a quaint Italian joint in Burbank, we discussed burning G.I. Joes and Barbies as kids, dropping wads of cash in the electronic hubs of Tokyo, and a strange position called "The Sidewinder." Indeed numbers were exchanged.

After one month, MMODating has given me at least a glimmer of hope. The only real problem left is finding more women, since the service is so new. ■ **Jon M. Gibson**

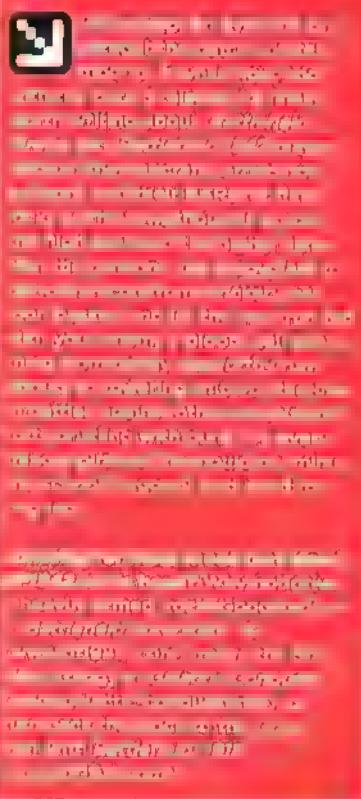
## ON THE DL

Freebies live and direct from the Web



### Battlefield Pirates

[www.bfpirates.com](http://www.bfpirates.com)



## NEWS FEED

» Stuck in the '80s? A recent London concert celebrated Commodore 64 games. See for yourself at [www.c64audio.com](http://www.c64audio.com). » Mad game. *Madden 2005* sold 1.35 million copies in its first week. Believe it or not, you can already preorder for 2006. »

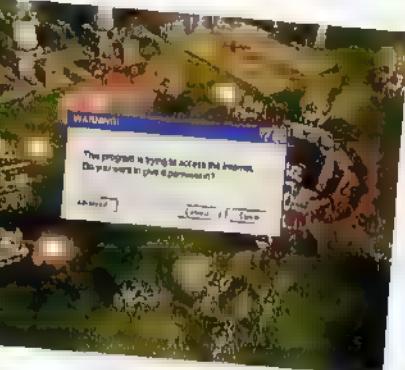
EXPECTING PATCHES

# Window Shutters

Firewall's fickle flaw targets games in XP Service Pack 2

**W**hen you install something on Windows XP, it usually works, but now there's a catalogue of programs—mostly games—that "may behave differently" if you've downloaded XP's new Service Pack 2 (SP2) release. Don't worry, the lengthy list posted on Microsoft's Knowledge Base (article 884130 at <http://support.microsoft.com>) only mentions little games like *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, *Age of Empires II: Age of Kings*, *Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield*, and *WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos*.

SP2, according to Microsoft, "introduces a number of new features that help increase performance and security." Unfortunately, the titles listed are getting tagged by Windows' firewall as security risks. What happens is that when you start a game, a dialogue box pops up and asks you to permit the title through the firewall. You don't see that pop-up box because the game is playing, so when you try to go online, you get nothing. Chris Donahue, Microsoft's lead technical evangelist for Windows gaming and graphics,



assures us that this problem is easily fixed. The obvious solution is to Alt-Tab out and answer the dialogue box if you can. Alternatively, you can go into the Security control panel applet and either permit games through the firewall prior to playing them or just customize the level of security with the slider (you can go to the point of turning off everything, but that is definitely not recommended). Don't panic, though. Donahue says that "[our internal teams] have not seen any other issues in the huge amount of testing we have done." □ Darren Gladstone

## CONSOLE CORNER

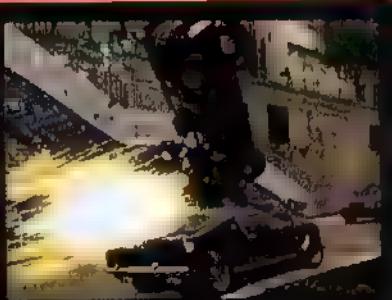
What's worth swiping from your kid brother?

PS2, XBOX

### Burnout 3: Takedown

What better way to unwind after a hard day's work than a head-on collision? The *Burnout* series has been great but hidden in obscurity. Now that EA has acquired developer Criterion and this kick-ass title, it's getting the polish and attention it deserves. If you haven't heard of the series before, here it is in a nutshell: drive really, really fast, crash, repeat.

This blazing arcade racing game has a number of modes and conveys blistering speed better than just about anything you can find on the road. But the one mode that has everyone in the office playing long after we should be are the ridiculous crash modes, which reward



you for creating massive pileups. We've noticed that we seem to get higher scores in this mode after a couple drinks.

ALSO CHECK OUT: *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* (GC, PS2, XB) and *Sly Cooper 2: Band of Thieves* (PS2).

## NEWS FEED

» Bin Laden found in bad PC game. System 3 is set to release America's 70 Most Wanted late in 2004. No doubt it'll be tasteful and well-polished. »



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[www.kewelareyou.com](http://www.kewelareyou.com)

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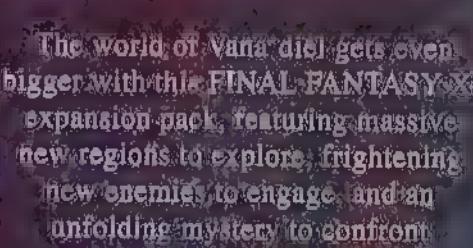
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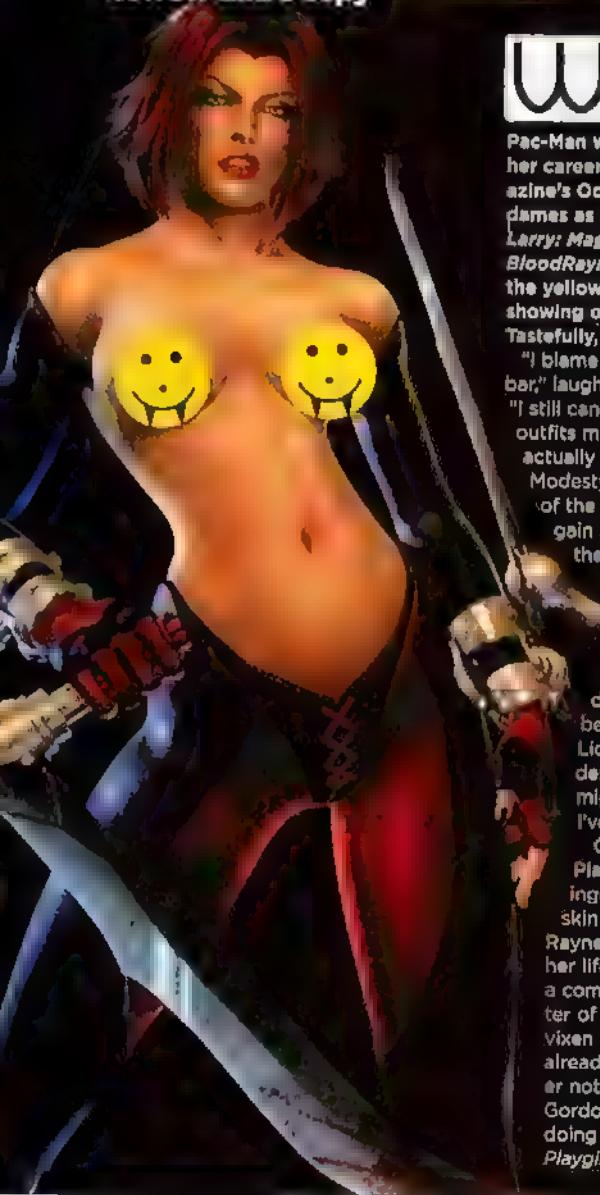
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# Naked Ambition

Gaming gals pose for *Playboy*; fanboys to borrow dad's copy



**W**hile it was inevitable that a videogame heroine would someday pose for *Playboy*, we always just assumed Ms. Pac-Man would do it first, to resurrect her career. But with a layout in the magazine's October issue, such digital dames as Luba Licious from *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* and *BloodRayne 2* babe Rayne have beaten the yellow bingie eater to the punch by showing off their naughty bytes. Tastefully, of course.

"I blame Janet Jackson for raising the bar," laughs Rayne of her topless shoot. "I still can't believe I did it. I know my outfits might indicate otherwise, but I'm actually not much of an exhibitionist." Modesty aside, the Anna Kournikova of the game industry has a lot to gain since this shoot coincides with the release of her newest game, *BloodRayne 2*, this October.

It wasn't modesty that almost stopped some from showing off their special features, though. "I really don't want to be thought of as being just some cute code," says Licious, "but I'm not going to be designed this way forever. I might as well do it now, while I've got the pixels."

Of course, like most Playmates, these interactive ingénues have more than just skin on their schedule. Take Rayne. Besides the new PC game, her life story has been optioned for a comic book and a movie, the latter of which stars *Terminator 3* vixen Kristanna Loken and has already begun shooting. On another note, there's no word from Gordon Freeman's people if he'll be doing that alleged spread in *Playgirl*. —Paul Sama

## THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

News and views from the Wild West

### The Good *The Sims 2*

Yeah, yeah, we know it's cool to bag on *The Sims*, but *The Sims 2* is out now, whether you like it or not, and once again, whether you like it or not, Will Wright and company have proven their genius. So do yourself a favor and get over it or risk missing out on one of the best games of the year so far. Just because your mom likes it doesn't mean it's not cool. Wait—did we really just type that?



### The Bad Windows XP Service Pack 2

As much as it's humanly possible to love an operating system without it being creepy in a David Cronenberg sort of way, we love Windows XP. Love it. But the new, highly publicized Service Pack 2 is a bit of a nightmare for gamers, who, after installing it, are finding a whole host of games are now incapable of running. This is after Microsoft has made a big PR push to show how serious it is about PC gaming. Ya know, we've still waiting to see it.



### The Ugly *Star Wars* not dead yet?

We don't mean the games. LucasArts has been on a nice roll for years now with mostly solid series of *Star Wars* games. But as we went to press, a nasty rumor started floating around the Web that Lucas is actually seriously considering making the *Episodes 7 through 9* movies now. Please, we are begging you: Stop trampling on our childhood memories. *Episodes 1 and 2* were bad enough. Let the movies die now.

### NEWS FEED

» You can't keep a good girl down. Or Lara Croft. The tomb raider will be back at it again next summer with a new game by Crystal Dynamix. Croft creator Toby Gard has joined the effort. » Sega is coming back to the PC. Stay tuned. ☺

CRY HAVOK

# Let's Get Physical

What exactly does the future of game physics have in store?

**A**nyone who has blasted a thug's legs out from under him in *Max Payne 2* or staked a few demons to the walls in *Painkiller* knows that Havok physics makes games more realistic. Objects move realistically in the environment and, of course, there's the fan-favorite "rag doll" effect of the recently deceased. But this is just the beginning. We decided to see for ourselves how the magic happens and what needs improving. So, who better to visit than the engineers at Havok headquarters?

## CUTTING THE STRINGS

According to Evin Levey, one of the engineers who helps developers integrate Havok into their game's code, "We're looking at three or four ways to take us away from that bag-of-bones rag doll toward more realistic behavior. When a character gets shot, you don't want to turn on the physics immediately—unless he gets shot in the head. You want to see him put his hands to the wound, maybe fall to his knees, and then feather in the rag doll. Or when a guy gets hit in the head, he's going to have a little control, but he's dazed, so you want a blend between some type of A.I. behavior and physics behavior."

There's another problem right now with rag-dolling, though. As soon as you cap a target in current games, it's like you've just cut a marionette's strings. Joints disappear, the limbs fold in on themselves, and the illusion of reality is broken. "Biomechanics" is the key word there, and the trick is creating joint and muscle limits. This is still very much in development.

As processor power continues to increase, more detailed simulations of the real world become possible, which means more



Here's a hit list with a bunch of the games currently using Havok Physics.

dynamic gameplay. "How about a virtual skydive level?" muses Steve Cooper, Havok's director of marketing communications. "You transition from a chaotic free fall to a controlled freestyle dive position, and then once your chute opens, you descend to the ground, fighting side drafts using the chute's steering toggles, finally hitting your target. It comes down to creative designers wanting to replicate more of the real world."

Levey agrees. "I think we'll begin to see games where every object has a physical model associated with it, and not just rigid models, but also all kinds of soft bodies, such as hair that flows and cloth that can drape and ripple as it moves. This will open the door to a broader range of natural interactions and more realistic environments."

Already we've seen how authentic physical simulations allow players to bring real-world experience to bear on problem solving in the game world (most notably in *Deus Ex: Invisible War*), and that trend will continue. But imagine the difference in gameplay when A.I. opponents can use similar circumstantial strategies against us. That's something to look forward to.

"Gamers have very discerning appetites," says Herman Kaiser, Havok's vice president of sales for North America. "They constantly expect the next visual leap, the next level of interaction in any sort of gameplay, so we have to continue to provide that." ■ Paul Byrnes

## 5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN CGW

What we said when you were young

### 5 Years Ago, November 1999

"So the best-case scenario is that we ate cow ass." Ah, yes, five years ago, CGW endured the infamous biltong fiasco, where jerky made from bull testicles and ass was unwittingly consumed by the edit staff. The less said about that, the better. We gazed into our #5 Ball of Scrying with our cover story on the five games that would change gaming forever. Not so great, our forecasting skills—*Halo* became the first big Xbox game, *Freelancer* languished for years, *Black & White* failed to live up to its promise, and *Good & Evil* just plain died. Hey, at least we called *The Sims* right.

### 10 Years Ago, November 1994

Sweet sassy molassy, has it actually been a full decade since we reviewed *Doom II*? Time sure flies when you're gibbing the minions of hell. Not surprisingly, we loved the game, gave it 4.5 stars, and even ran a full feature on 10 "Doom Toos" (golly, we're clever with headlines). Some good games made that list: *Dark Forces*, *Descent*, *Heretic*, and *Rise of the Triad*. And so did the very lame *Isle of the Dead*. We had two surly cover boys this month: the hellacious Ben from *Full Throttle* and a really constipated-looking Patrick Stewart.

### 15 Years Ago, November 1989

Before classic-style games were available as free Flash-driven entertainment, we reviewed things like *Cribbage King/Gin King*—over two pages. We don't do that nowadays, though the Q4-loaded release schedule for PC games has made us consider if we should, lest we have an empty Reviews section. Pickings were slim 15 years ago as well, but our Holiday Gift Guide did hint at some happiness, with titles like *SimCity*, *MechWarrior*, *Hero's Quest*, and *It Came from the Desert* getting buy recommendations.

"Gamers constantly expect the next visual leap, the next level of interaction in any sort of gameplay"

■ STAR STRUCK

# Field Report

The Star Wars game you've always wanted to play

 The toughest part of killing an Ewok? Scraping its innards out from between your AT-ST's toes. During an editorial throwdown of intergalactic proportions, we got to play more of the upcoming FPS fragfest *Star Wars Battlefront*. We won—big surprise. Long live the Empire!

The long and the short of it: the game looks good and has a solid sampling of the *Star Wars* universe. We just need to see more of the single player campaign. The game played well in a number of maps—Endor, Hoth, and Camino—and looks like it's on target for a firm September 21 release date (that's right around the time this issue should be in your hands—so go buy the game already!).

As for the event itself? Well, a shuttle dropped us in the hot zone, one of the more Endor-like quadrants of San Francisco (the Presidio), where we were greeted by the troops. Very surreal.

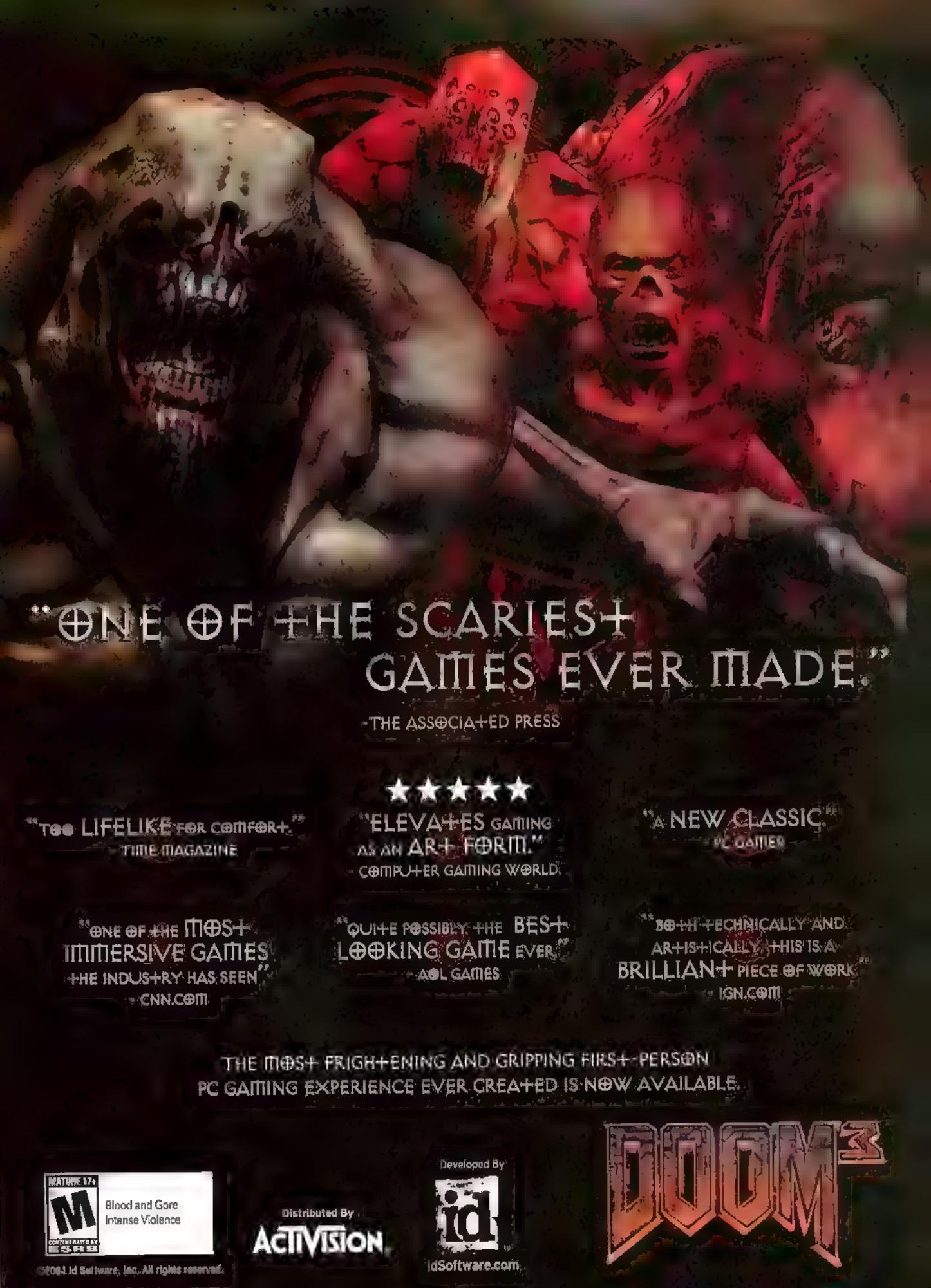


## DUMPSTER DIVER

Digging up gold in the bargain bins

 Ever since the *Grand Theft Auto* series took off, countless developers have made countless attempts to ape its success with their own crime-themed action games. The trouble is, most of them end up as little more than shallow imitators, devoid of the sophistication that makes the *GTA* games as great as they are. Take, for instance, Activision's recent *True Crime: Streets of L.A.* For \$60 that this rip-off costs, you could instead get the superior *GTA 3* and *Mafia*—and even have enough left over to rent *Seaweed*.





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# DOOM®

## THE NERD HERD

Street geeks speak

**What type of war games do you prefer: modern, historical, or futuristic? Why?**



**DAVID BAUTISTA**  
TOUGH

I totally enjoyed the school warfare. I was sponsored by the band and the band gave me a cool guy and all they say.

**What's your favorite game? Why?**



**MIKE EVERITT**  
HARDWARE

Because the tools and weapons have much more variety. More based on real life, but it's still a lot of fun.

**What's your favorite game? Why?**



**RYAN COGNETTI**  
HIGH-DEFINITION

Modern and over-the-top weapons are more interesting. Sure, the older weapons in MIA is funny, but it's been done.

**What's your favorite game? Why?**



**MICHAEL JOHNSON**  
HARDWARE

It depends on the multi-player game. Prefer the good guys because of the lower price, but when it comes to the enjoyment, it's not about the price.

**What's your favorite game? Why?**



**MICHAEL JOHNSON**  
HARDWARE

It depends on the multi-player game. Prefer the good guys because of the lower price, but when it comes to the enjoyment, it's not about the price.

KINGS OF INDUSTRY

# MUSIC TO SUCK TO

**How Ministry saved the day, er...night, for Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines**



Want to hear a bit of "Bloodlines" for yourself? Check it out on next month's CD.

**A**ctivision was screwed. The bloodsucking role-playing game *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines* was due to be released, and Rob Zombie, who was going to record the game's theme song, dropped out. So Activision did the only thing it could do: The company asked Ministry's main man Al Jourgensen to record a song. "They were very lucky," explains Jourgensen from his Texas abode, "because it just so happened that we were in the studio working on our new album, *Houses of the Molé*, when they called."

Within days, Jourgensen was on a flight to Activision's HQ, where he was promptly blown away. "The graphics and the amount of options are both pretty mind-boggling," he says. "In fact, the game made such an impression on me that I wrote the song in my head on the plane coming back, and it was recorded and

sent back to them in a week."

Unfortunately, the whole process was so last-minute that the song, "Bloodlines," didn't make it on to *Molé*. Not that it would've been included anyway. "It really doesn't fit the gist of the album,"

Jourgensen explains. "The album is very political, and all the song titles begin with the letter 'W'—'Worthless,' 'Wrong'—and I didn't want to call the song 'Bloodlines.'

"I also wanted to make sure the album came out well before the elections in November because during our tour we are going to do a lot of voter registration in conjunction with punkvoter.com."

That isn't to say "Bloodlines" won't turn up on a Ministry album someday or that the band won't play it during their upcoming tour. After all, they'll be playing the game. "Between me and my game-addicted drummer," Jourgensen says, "I'm sure it will be a staple when we start touring." **Paul Sennel**

# 100 BUCKS

It's burning a hole in your pocket. Go spend it.

## Star Wars Trilogy

\$199; [WWW.AMAZON.COM](http://WWW.AMAZON.COM)  
That George Lucas sure knows how to market himself and make some greenbacks in the process. A long overdue remastered retelling of the original trilogy comes to DVD with a Death Star's worth of extras, including behind-the-scenes featurettes, commentaries, and a sneak peek at *Star Wars Episode III*—the movie and the game. Oh, and as if you didn't have enough things to spend money on already, the sweet-looking *Star Wars Battlefront* comes out on the same day.



## Bad Religion, The Empire Strikes First

\$12; [WWW.AMAZON.COM](http://WWW.AMAZON.COM)  
Speaking of empires, who better to shout out in song than those Bad Religion punks? Bang your head or use it to think as you listen to such punk-rock anthems as "Los Angeles Is Burning" and "Let Them Eat War." These socially aware rockers have been commenting on the state of things with a driving, hard, punk rock beat for years, and they aren't fading with age.



## Ex Machina

\$15; [WWW.WILDESTORM.COM](http://WWW.WILDESTORM.COM)  
Comics don't have enough of a weird edge to them—at least not enough to satisfy our tastes. Thankfully, *Ex Machina* has come along. In it, an average Joe with superheroic aspirations gets the power to remotely control all



machinery. The interesting twist, though, is how he turns his back on his powers to become the mayor of New York City and has to deal with the everyday problems of running the Big Apple.

### DVD/MUSIC

#### Pixies

\$16; [WWW.AMAZON.COM](http://WWW.AMAZON.COM)  
This DVD, which coincided with the CD release of the Pixies' greatest hits CD (you DO have that, right?), is a fantastic chronicling of this intense band. Well, over 2 hours of footage awaits you here. There's concert footage, all of the Pixies' videos, and documentaries that show you about their life on the road. A must for fans, and a great glimpse for newbs who want to check this band out!



## Sleeper

\$3; [WWW.WILDESTORM.COM](http://WWW.WILDESTORM.COM)  
*Sleeper* is a superpowered glance at the covert-ops world. Special agent Holden Carver gains strange abilities in a freak accident. Now, he's infiltrating a supervillain organization as a double agent. There's a problem, though: His handler, the one

person who knows that he's working for the good guys, is in a coma. The comic series split up into "seasons," reads like a great-and-tense-TV show, such as *The Wire* or *The Wire*.



## Hellboy—Director's Cut

\$20; [WWW.AMAZON.COM](http://WWW.AMAZON.COM)  
The movie, in case you missed it in theaters, was awesome. The DVD was equally impressive, chock-full of extra features and quality commentary tracks. Now here's the thing that cheeses us off: A director's cut version is on the way with all the bells and whistles and, word has it, 15 extra minutes restored to the film. We dug the movie, so we could be talked into buying this version. One warning to Del Toro: If you make another one after that, we ain't buying unless there are gold bricks inside.

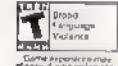
## Quiznos, small.turkey sub

\$4.50; [WWW.QUIZNOS.COM](http://WWW.QUIZNOS.COM)  
Last month we declared the Rice Krispies Treat the de facto snack of CGW. Now, we're going to out ourselves as Quiznos sub fans. No, it wasn't the TV ads of creepy singing Chihuahuas that lured us in (OK, maybe a little bit) or even the sub sandwiches themselves. It's because we are totally surrounded. There are at least three locations within a three-block radius. Is this the new Starbucks or something?

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# ROME

## TOTAL WAR



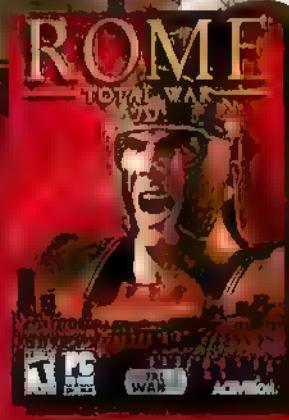
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# Previews



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in a turn-based  
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*Yester*!





CGW has the exclusive first look at the sequel to our 1999 Strategy Game of the Year.



This Vietnam-based FPS is from one of the splinter factions that created *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*.



Get your motor running. Head out on the racetrack. Looking for adventure and a lot of left turns.

PUBLISHER Atari DEVELOPER Firaxis NRE Pirate Sim RELEASE DATE November 2004

# Sid Meier's Pirates!

Shiver me timbers!



**A**t Firaxis, the mantra is: "It's all about the gamer." It's almost a cliché, but when Sid Meier says it in that quiet, unassuming tone of his, it sounds more like a holy mission. The concept for his next game is simple: be a pirate. The implementation of that concept, however, is markedly complex. While the original 1987 *Pirates!* evokes imagery of assorted pirate-themed minigames, the upcoming remake is the sum of many parts that go far beyond this simple convention.

*Sid Meier's Pirates!* is a role-playing game in the broadest sense: You assume the role of a grog-swilling pirate and live a life of debauchery and mayhem. The statistical elements of most role-playing games are nowhere to be found, though. Sure, you can take up skills such as fencing, medicine, and dancing. Your character even ages and rises in reputation and rank as time passes—but that's where the RPG elements end.

## PLAYING A ROLE

Instead, Meier and his team at Firaxis have cherry-picked the most entertaining elements of the swashbuckling, high-seas sailing genre to create a unique and multifaceted experience. At the heart of it all is, of course, your trusty pirate ship. You'll sail your mighty vessel around a sun-drenched

Caribbean, attacking other ships and plundering their booty. Sea combat is fairly simple: There is just enough detail to provide interesting choices, but it never gets overwhelmingly tactical.

There's plenty of action on good old terra firma for all you landlubbers out there, too. When you're not terrorizing the high seas, you'll be visiting taverns for information and crewmen, courting the governor's daughter, sneaking through darkened streets, and taking over cities. These elements encompass several game genres—the tavern sequences have a distinct adventure-game feel, while wooing the governor's daughter involves a timing-based music game. The sneaking segments call for some stealth action, and land battles unfold as tactical, turn-based combat sequences. You can even dabble in trading for some tycoon-style fun. Taken together, these elements form an interesting sort of gaming gestalt.

## TACTICAL LAND BATTLES

Throughout most of its development cycle, *Pirates!* used Meier's *Gettysburg* and *Antietam* as models for its land-based combat: three-dimensional battlefields, complex group movements, and morale elements, all in real time. While

Meier's historical approach might have been tantalizing for fans of his previous games, he feared that dropping gamers into a comparatively complex tactical element would be jarring. "Suddenly they were in a real-time strategy game, not a pirate game," he says.

Instead of trying to keep the sinking ship afloat, Meier rewrote the land combat engine from scratch, converting it from real-time to turn-based combat. Units now spend points to move and attack, and facing, flanking, elevation, routing, ranged fire, and terrain are all key parts of the combat model. Unit selection is still being locked down, but it is expected to include a balanced assortment of pirates, swordsmen, horsemen, scouts, buccaneers, cannons, and Indians.

## THE RETURN OF ECLECTICISM

All told, the overall structure and flow of the new *Pirates!* does a seemingly good job of paying homage to the original. A few jaded gamers may find that 17 years of radical shifts in game design theory has soured their appreciation for such an eclectic cross-genre experience, but the rest of us have waited long enough. It's been a good long while since we last tried to win the hand of the governor's lovely daughter, and if we have to shake our moneymakers to do it, then by the beard of Long John Silver, we will. □ Tom McDonald

**THE WORD / ARRR**

**Meier and his team have cherry-picked the most entertaining elements of the high-seas sailing genre.**

Every morning's just the same  
In this poor provincial town...



PUBLISHER Take-Two/Gathering DEVELOPER Firefly Studios GENRE RTS RELEASE DATE April 2005

# Stronghold 2

Lord almighty



Project  
Stronghold  
Burn!

**M**aking a sequel to a best-selling game is always a challenge. Not only must developers give people more of what they liked the first time around, but they've also got to come up with enough fresh material to justify the sequel's existence. *Stronghold: Crusader*, which was the first sequel to the medieval castle-building-and-defense sim, *Stronghold*, was criticized in some circles for seeking too much like an expansion. Designers Simon Bradbury and Eric Ouilette are determined not to leave such criticism this time around. "Our goal in *Stronghold 2*," says Bradbury, "has been not to reinvent the wheel, but also not just to do the same game again with new graphics."

#### STORMIN' THE CASTLE

According to the game's premise, the aim is to construct castles from scratch, defend them from the surrounding towns, and conquer other cities by military means. Several new elements have also been added. Though your mischievous but benevolent懒惰 but仁慈的 lord of the castle, the lazy lord doesn't actually do much (instead he's content to focus on the peasants and foot soldiers

at his disposal). This time around, you get to choose your army, which includes everything from previous expansions as well as new units such as the crossbowmen, archers, catapults, and even your own personal knight. More interestingly, however, are the new combat mechanics.

The developer has tried to add a greater variety to combat, so when coming at the castle from the air via the warplane, you'll be able to drop bombs on your enemies. You can also climb ladders and scale the castle walls to get to the top. If you're not up to climbing, you can always use the catapults to lob projectiles at your foes. If you're feeling particularly adventurous, you can even explore the castle's interior and search for hidden treasures and secret rooms.

Speaking of the game's graphics, much has been done to literally burn the original 3D engine a new, improved one. The result is a more detailed and refined game. The graphics are still somewhat blocky, but the improved textures, lighting, and shading make the game look much more polished.

Indeed, *Stronghold 2* is a much more polished game than its predecessor. It's not only more visually appealing, but it's also more fun to play. The combat mechanics have been refined, making battles more dynamic and exciting. The game's story is also more compelling, with a clear narrative arc that keeps you engaged throughout the entire experience.

#### KING ME

Of course, you have to be a bit of a leader to succeed in this game. You'll need to manage resources, recruit workers, and defend your castle from invaders. But if you're up for the challenge, you'll find that *Stronghold 2* offers a unique and rewarding experience. It's a game that's sure to keep you entertained for hours on end.

On the other hand, if—despite Firefly's best efforts—you choose to stick to the original game, you won't be disappointed. With its impressive graphics and lots of fun, it's a game that you won't want to put down. So if you're a fan of the game master, here's your chance.

**Stronghold 2** is a game that's sure to impress. It's a worthy successor to last year's *Stronghold: Crusader*, and it's definitely a game worth getting.

—KINGMAKER

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# Men of Valor

The horror, the survival horror...

**I**t used to be that just making the somewhat risky decision to place your game in Vietnam would be more than enough to distinguish it from the pack of military shooters. Not anymore. Vietnam is fast becoming the new World War II, with more and more titles joining the conflict. With so much competition, how do you carve out your own little piece of the jungle? The answer, in *Men of Valor*, is to retain the action while ratcheting up the tension with a significant shift in tone.

If anyone can re-create the war shooter, it's this design team, one of the shards of the exploded *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* team. The work on the game reflects 2015's continuing refinement of the combat shooter. *Men of Valor* features multiple firing modes for the weapons, a damage model that handles both "permanent" damage and quickly patched up "bleeding" damage, new multiplayer modes, including search & destroy, where teams race to assemble a mortar to destroy their opponents, and all sorts of graphical effects and buzzwords like "parallax mapping textures."

## WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

But the biggest innovation is going to be the one that's hardest to put your finger on—the tone of the game.

Thanks to the easily despised Nazis and the clearer good vs. evil understanding of World War II, games based upon that conflict can wrap themselves in glory and classic movie-style heroism. Vietnam is a much trickier, more conflicted war, and yet *Men of Valor* is still shooting for that movie-style experience albeit in the darker, murkier vein of *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*. The sense of combat in *Men of Valor* will be focused on simple survival, on enduring the sudden, brutal violence of war.

2015's trademark scripted sequences, the heat shimmer of smoldering fires, and the more than 300 lines of gritty dialogue per character (all dynamically triggered based on game situations) are brought into play to create a more desperate, threatening game world than we've ever seen in a combat shooter. "Displacement mapping on holage" sounds like just another designer catchphrase, until you see the game in action and realize that the only way you might pick up on an NVA ambush is by noticing the subtle parting of long grass in the distance. This is a game that quietly warns you it's coming to get you before it hits Hard.



The game takes you from Da Nang in 1967 through the Tet offensive.



At dawn, a firefight rages on a distant bridge.

If anyone can re-create the war shooter, it's this dev team, one of the shards of the exploded *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* team.

Don't misunderstand the chief focus of the game. It will still deliver the run-and-gun thrills that you expect and want. We watched a rail-shooter portion of the game taking place during a nighttime boat patrol and were riveted. The pounding shockwaves of artillery, the wisps of fog on the water's surface, the blistering sound of the mounted machine gun, the reflected tracer fire upon the river, all of it added up to a truly gripping combat experience. □ Robert Coffey

**JUNGLE FEVER**

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PREVIEWS



The most realistic  
NASCAR yet.

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts DEVELOPER EA Tiburon RELEASE DATE Q1 2005

# NASCAR 2005

Days of thunder



You've got mail, losers!

**N**ASCAR fans, start your engines. EA is revving up for another high-octane race to the finish. EA Tiburon, the Florida-based studio responsible for EA's *Madden NFL* franchise, is developing *NASCAR 2005* completely in-house, which is a first for the series. Tiburon's intention is to create a deep, realistic racing simulator—something that traditionally hasn't had much competition in the PC market. Now that EA holds the exclusive NASCAR gaming license, it's got a straight shot at the checkered flag with what promises to be the most accurate and up-to-date NASCAR simulation to date.

#### START YOUR ENGINES

*NASCAR 2005* one-ups its predecessors with completely overhauled textures, better-looking environments, and even more realistic vehicular modeling. Tiburon has done its homework when it comes to the racetracks, with the in-game tracks echoing recent real-world course revisions.

As an example of said course revision, let's look at the Homestead Miami Speedway. This racetrack was renovated just last year, with its banking maximized to 20 degrees, the highest possible. The modification was digitally duplicated into *NASCAR 2005* before the actual track's construction was even completed, giving

NASCAR champs an early opportunity to sample the revised Homestead course before starting their engines on the real thing. In fact, participation from real NASCAR drivers has been instrumental to *NASCAR 2005*'s development process—Tiburon's offices have been graced by everyone from Jeff Gordon to Dale Earnhardt Jr., and their input has gone a long way toward making this new NASCAR game the biggest yet.

Course geography isn't the only big revision, though. *NASCAR 2005* will also reflect all the recent changes throughout the NASCAR circuit, such as the new Nextel Cup, which replaced the all-important Winston Cup in the end of 2003. This also carries with it a new playoff point system, pitting the 10 highest-scoring racers against one another in the final 10 of the 36 races that make up the series.

Besides the Nextel Cup, there are two other series that should provide even more for NASCAR junkies: the Busch Series and the Craftsman Series. The

**Tiburon's offices have been graced by everyone from Jeff Gordon to Dale Earnhardt Jr.**

Craftsman Series is a particularly interesting choice, since it marks the first appearance of Craftsman truck racing in a PC NASCAR title. Trucks have a distinctly different feel—much heavier, yet still fast and able to plow right through the wind. All of the trucks—and cars, for that matter—will feature detailed textures, customizable color choices, and full damage modeling for all you crash-up derby fans.

#### SPEEDY SIMULATION

While *NASCAR 2005* doesn't have the steepest learning curve in the world, it's heavily grounded in real-world physics. For example, there seems to be a marked necessity to compensate steering even while on some straightaways in order to account for the lean in the track. In fact, it's safe to say that the PC version of *NASCAR 2005* is a decidedly different beast than its more arcade-like console cousin, *NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup*. Players with a hankering for a less-realistic racing experience might be better served elsewhere—not that it's a bad thing, but *NASCAR 2005* isn't for everyone.

The PC version of *NASCAR 2005* is scheduled to launch early next year, to coincide with the 2005 season of NASCAR racing. ■ Johnny Liu

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PUBLISHER Electronic Arts DEVELOPER Electronic Arts Canada GENRE Racing RELEASE DATE Fall 2004

# Need for Speed Underground 2

A fast and furious free-for-all



Visually, *Need for Speed: Underground 2* looks ready to outglam the impressive original.

**S**tep up your road rockets! Last year's hottest racing game is back on the road. *Need for Speed: Underground 2* is well into production, and this time you won't be forced through strictly linear courses. Instead, you drive around and pick up challenges in an open city. Indeed, *NFSU2* aims to immerse players in the tuner culture with a customized gaming experience.

#### "NOS" TO MEET YA

Instead of presenting races in a linear fashion, *NFSU2* is driven by an open-world concept. While searching for challenges you can scout out any of the game's five distinct neighborhoods, which are linked together by freeways. What's more, you can choose your own battles. Not into drag racing? Don't bother with it. Race drift challenges instead.

In the Outrun challenge, you attempt to outrun your opponent's car within a set number of miles. The tough part is keeping up with your foe as he tries to evade your the nonlinear nature of the game map.

means that your rival can drive "nowhere" she wants, so long as she instantly with a sharp turn if you aren't quick enough.

As a normal player, you'll be doing quickly, so there's no need to rush point to it. Knowing this, the development team has focused on providing choices without pose: A player's success or failure will hinge upon the choices made in the overarching story that drives the game.

#### OPENENDED GAMEPLAY

only thing to look forward to. Famed beauty Brooke Burke will star as Rachel, a wise and enticing race organizer. Think of her as your own personal hot Yoda, guiding you on the path toward racing enlightenment.

#### GENDER BENDING

*NFSU2* will include LAN capabilities, but the development team still hasn't decided whether there will be multiplayer cross-compatibility between the PC and console versions. While this seems like a soft marketing

Chrome tires, carbon matte hood—plimp dat ride!



the original, cheating PC players undermine the online experience, the sequel would have to be enterprised.

Plus, with the huge number of missions and exercises available, there's always the possibility of "too much of a good thing." Hopefully, each of the race world's five neighborhoods will capture a distinctive look while maintaining that "hard to nail" sense of a natural city. Otherwise, it would be easy to get lost, leaving you to roam the city's streets in search of something to do. —Brooke Johnson smokes some super bowl

The Word TUNED UP

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PlayStation®2



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# Pipeline

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

Game	Developer	Expected
Advent Rising	Blue Byte	Q1 2005
Atlantis Evolution	Paradox Interactive	Q3 2004
Auto Assault	NCSOFT	2004
Axis & Allies	Axis & Allies	Q4 2004
The Bard's Tale	Paradox Interactive	2005
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Q1 2005
Black & White II	Electronic Arts	2005
BloodRayne 2	Majesco Games	Q1 2005
Brothers in Arms	Ubisoft	October 2004
City of Villains	NCSOFT	January 2005
Civilization IV	Atari	2005
Conflict: Vietnam	Paradox	Q1 2005
Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars	Genesis Publishing	September 2004
Dark Age of Camelot	Mythic Entertainment	December 2004
DRIV3R	Atari	November 2004
Dragon Age	Microsoft	2004
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	January 2005	
Dungeon Lords	DreamCatcher	October 2004
Dungeon Siege II	Microsoft	Q1 2005
Dungeons & Dragons RTS	2005	
Empire Earth 2	Vivendi Universal	Q1 2005
EverQuest II	SOF	November 2004
FEAR	Vivendi Universal	2005
Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich	First Person Studios	2005
Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	November 2004
Guild Wars	NCSOFT	October 2004
Half-Life 2	Valve Corporation	2004
Hitman 4	Eidos Interactive	Q2 2005
The Incredibles	TIIQ	October 2004
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi Universal	October 2004
LOTR: The Battle for Middle-earth	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004-Q1 2005
The Matrix Online	Sega	October 2004
Men of Valor	Vivendi Universal	Q4 2004
Middle-earth Online	Vivendi Universal	February 2005
The Movies	Activision	May 2005
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	Electronic Arts	February 2005
NBA Live 2005	Electronic Arts	October 2004
0	Electronic Arts	November 2004
Operation Flashpoint 2: Codename: Iron	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
Origin of the Species	In Synergy	January 2005

» New Update

©UBI-SHE & Vivendi Universal DEVELOPER: NCSOFT Mad Doc Software GENRE: RTS RELEASE DATE: Q1 2005

# Empire Earth 2

## History of the world, part two



**I**he world can be a better place. Oh, who are we kidding? Let capitalism reign and grind the world under your boot. The world on a silver platter is yours in *Empire Earth 2*. A few months back, we broke the news about Mad Doc Software's work to improve Stainless Steel Studios' original *Empire Earth*. We've had a chance to check out the progress thus far, and we've got to say, Alexander the Great would be proud.

### THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

As in the original game, you'll grow nations from approximately 10,000 B.C. to about A.D. 2230. This time, there are around 15 civilizations to cultivate, including Aztec, Babylonian, Greek, Incan, and Turkish. Each nation will have distinct advantages, bonuses, and military units. There's a traditional campaign traversing 15 epochs, three smaller campaigns (Ancient Korea, Germany during the Middle Ages, and modern America), and a 10-player skirmish mode. This is where the similarities to the previous game—and a lot of other RTS games—end.

"In the past five or six years, not a lot has changed when it comes to RTS games," says Mad Doc associate producer Brian Myslwy. That's the motivation that has been pushing the developers for the past year on this project. Their goals: more intelligent options and controls that are as seamless as possible.

### TOTALITARIAN CONTROL

And, really, control is what these games should be all about. What impressed us most during our demo were the tools that streamline everything from warmongering to peacemaking. A citizen manager makes it a simple matter to command the teeming masses and automate the micromanagement.

The diplomacy and war managers will make or break this game. With diplomacy tools, you can set up alliances, and with a simple slider interface, you can set the terms of your peace accords. Allies can travel through your land, but while there, they won't be able to build military outposts or see what's happening in your territory. Want to declare war when your neighbor hits the fifth epoch? It's on!

The war manager is perfectly suited for multiplayer matches when you want to coordinate attack plans with allies. Call up a world map and draw out your plans, telling where and how to strike. Put the plans up for a vote and execute them. How will that translate into the single-player campaign? Conceivably, the A.I. will pick up the slack, but Myslwy didn't have a firm answer as we went to press.

While the jury is still out on whether the sequel will surpass the original, this *Empire* is yours for the taking come February 2005. □ **Daren Gladstone**

The War TOTALITARIAN

**What impressed us most during our demo were the tools that streamline everything from warmongering to peacemaking.**

# KOHAN II KINGS OF WAR

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TIMEGATE



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Are you trying to tell me I can dodge bullets?

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# MATRIX

ONLINE

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# PIPELINE

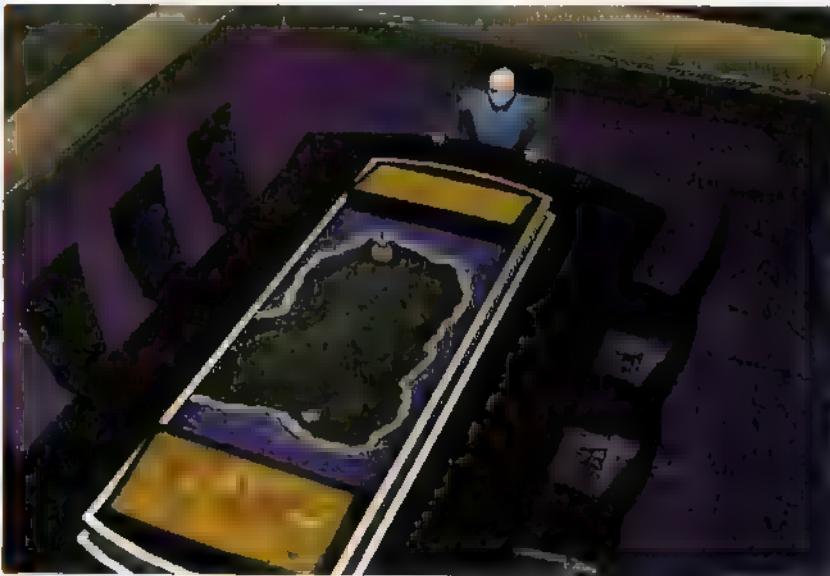
Game	Developer	Expected
Pacific Fighters	Ubisoft	October 2004
■ <i>Paranormal Out of Hell</i>	DreamCatcher	October 2004
Pariah	EA Games	September 2004
Playboy: The Mansion	Anarchy Interactive	November 2004
Priest	EA Tiburon	2004
Prince of Persia 2	Ubisoft	November 2004
Psychotoxic	GDV Software	2004
Quake IV	Activision	2004
■ <i>Reindeer</i>	Vivendi Universal	March 2005
RogerCoaster Tycoon 3	Atari	November
■ <i>Rocky Horror Picture Show</i>	Galaxysoft	2004
Shade: Wrath of Angels	CosmoSoft	October 2004
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	November 2004
Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	February 2005
5 Cent Hunter III	Ubisoft	2004
Silent Storm: Sentinels	Encore Software	2004
Splinter Cell Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	UM 2004
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	THQ	November 2004
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to LightSpeed	LucasArts	October 2004
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II —The Sith Lords	LucasArts	February 2005
Star Wars Republic Commando	LucasArts	February 2005
State of Emergency 2	Rum Entertainment	Q4 2004
■ Starship Troopers: Supremacy: Four Paths to Power	Empire Interactive	Q4 2004
Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategic First	Q4 2004
SWAT 4	Vivendi Universal	Q4 2004
Tekken Rasa	AVGsoft	March 2005
Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Vivendi Universal	2004
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2	Konami	October 2004
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	October 2004
■ Top Spin	Atari	Q4 2004
Tribes: Vengeance	Vivendi Universal	October 2004
■ Ultima Online: Samurai Empire	Electronic Arts	November 2004
■ Universal Combat: Edge to Edge	DreamCatcher	November 2004
Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines	Activision	October 2004
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	Microsoft	2005
World of Warcraft	Blizzard Entertainment	Q4 2004
■ Worms Earth: Under Siege!	Arclight	April 2004
Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim	Konami	2005
Zoo Tycoon 2	Microsoft	October 2004

■ New    Update

■ PUBLISHER Vivendi Universal DEVELOPER Elixir Studios GENRE Strategy RELEASE DATE September 2004

# Evil Genius

Throw us a frickin' bone here!



What would an evil genius be without his inner sanctum?

**B**eing a criminal mastermind takes more work than the average Bond villain might have you believe. *Evil Genius*, Vivendi's upcoming world-domination strategy/simulator, casts you as a would-be dictator. We recently had a chance to delve into the criminal life with a late build of the game.

At first, your cavernous mountain lair consists of a simple entryway and a nearby construction room. You can order your few minions to expand your base by carving out corridors and other rooms, such as barracks, control rooms, and research areas. Your minions have statistics such as health, loyalty, and attention—which they seem prone to losing. The game is a little slow early on, since your workers tend to mill about and forget assignments.



Loyal henchmen are your front line against the forces of freedom and justice.

Fortunately, you can recruit a steady stream of followers, building an ever-growing league of workers, scientists, and social minions.

## THIS IS MY NO. 2 HENCHMAN, NUMBER TWO

You've also got a henchman at your command. Unlike minions, whose actions are governed by the orders they're collectively issued, you can directly control your henchman—you can choose the likes of a swordsman named Jubel or a big-haired *Pulp Fiction*-esque gangster named Ell. Your henchman, along with myriad traps with which to furnish your lair, are your prime defenses against the secret agents who constantly try to sabotage your operations.

Money and notoriety are gained by dispatching operatives via a world-map screen on which you can direct thievery and "acts of infamy" to raise your standing in the criminal underworld and open up new objectives. This portion of the game feels somewhat disconnected from the rest of *Evil Genius'* strategy-centric elements, but it definitely breaks the monotony of waiting around for minions to finish their jobs.

The life of a criminal mastermind is risky business. Is world domination truly worth all the hard work? Find out in next month's full review! □ Ryan Scott

The Word NOTORIOUS

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# DIGITAL UNDERGROUND



FROM Third Wave Games AVAILABILITY December 2004

## War World

**Word on the street:** Offering futuristic third-person mech combat, the first title from fledgling studio Third Wave borrows heavily from console competitors like *MechAssault*. Its delftful droid-on-droid action includes solo scenarios, minigames, and online multiplayer options in which pilots storm the ranking ladders for bragging rights and upgrades. Available via download for less than \$20, the prospect of regular expansions has our thrusters thumping.

**Sounds kinda beat:** Due to inherently limited development budgets, value-priced outings typically pack limited thrills. Besides, if the PC market really wanted more mech simulators, publishers would already happily provide them. But with *Heavy Gear*'s heyday long past and *Battletech*'s "stock" plummeting, opportunities for carving out a new niche do exist. Thus far, the product's creators primarily have experience designing award-winning wares for Nintendo and Sony systems—let's hope their luck holds out on the PC.

FROM DTF Games AVAILABILITY December 2004

## Stalingrad

**Word on the street:** War is hell, unless you portray it using *Blitzkrieg*'s software engine, in which case it's irresistibly attractive. Based on one of World War II's most storied battles, this strategic challenge sees players command both Russia's Red Army and Germany's Wehrmacht through two lengthy campaigns. Conflicts—captured in real time and depicted as missions modeled on historical data—sprawl across detailed maps inspired by actual aerial photography from the era. Participants don't so much play as enlist.

**Sounds kinda beat:** "Sounds" inappropriately rockin', thanks to a proposed "dub metal" soundtrack by St. Petersburg band Skafandr. In terms of gameplay, the program that first inspired this package was decently received but didn't score high marks when it debuted. The technology behind the game's tactics is getting a little long in tooth. The studio, DTF, hasn't yet proven its prowess, either. Nevertheless, if early screenshots are any indication, this is one romp you should be rooting for.



FROM G5 Software AVAILABILITY December 2004

## Cuban Missile Crisis

**Word on the street:** Remember when the Commies torched America? Neither do we. The events portrayed in this politically charged RTS ruckus throw the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. into war in 1962. Framed by a turn-based tactical front end, the skirmishes feature four sides vying for resources such as clean soil and water throughout a postapocalyptic planet Earth. The gist: beware of radioactive contaminated zones while blowing enemy units apart. Hey, works for us...

**Sounds kinda beat:** Granted, we realize that most of the major historical conflicts have been overdone, but give us a break—the Cuban Missile Crisis? No matter how good the game is, you'll always be wondering whether it's actually thinly veiled propaganda funded by Castro. Furthermore, Russian studio G5 has produced only one other title for American consumption (*Fair Strike*), a mediocre game at best. Let's hope we needn't nuke their asses, too.

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A large, semi-transparent photograph of a woman from the waist up. She has dark hair and is wearing a white, off-the-shoulder dress. A single red rose is tucked behind her ear. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

TAKE YOUR SIMS  
FROM THE CRADLE  
TO THE GRAVE IN  
*THE SIMS 2*

# MORE FUN IN THE NEW WORLD

BY ROBERT COFFEY

# D

I like *The Sims 2* so much because it's been four years since I played the first one, so it feels fresh to me again? Has the time between *The Sims* and *The Sims 2* acted like a delicate melon sorbet and simply cleansed my palate?

Well, some, sure, but the bottom line is, there are so many new elements to the game that even the most die-hard *Sims* fans, the expansion-pack addicts who've been playing daily since they got the first game, are going to discover a game that feels both familiar and brand new. Much as each iteration of *Civilization* has leapfrogged its predecessor and rendered it obsolete, so has *The Sims 2* eclipsed the original.

### THE ONCE-OVER TWICE

You can see how incredibly different *The Sims 2* is from its predecessor the moment you create your first Sim. The personalization options are virtually limitless. While there are a finite number of hairstyles, body types, skin colors, eye colors, eyeglasses, and clothing, it's in the facial construction options that you can truly make your mark. Simple-to-use tools govern everything from face length to eye size to neck-flap size. Even better, Sims who procreate will pass on their combined genetic data to their children for wholly unique yet familial new Sims. What *City of Heroes* did for costume creation, *The Sims 2* does for character creation. It's hypnotically addictive.

The end result is that you create faces that are incredibly alive—much of that due to the large number of emotive animations. Every tragedy or triumph, every seemingly mundane moment in a Sim's life has an accompanying facially expressive component. The new fully 3D world and full camera control create an environment rich in moments when you'll want to zoom in and enjoy the action, even if that action is as benign as a romantic moment shared by a long-married couple. Then again, those are the daily, moment-to-moment victories that drive the gameplay.

All that happens once the proper game is started. You've got more to do when creating your Sims this time around, even beyond the mind-boggling physical choices. In addition to adjusting each Sim's personality quirks (neatness, shyness, etc.), you must select one lifetime aspiration for your Sims (see sidebar for more details). Aspirations are an absolutely huge addition that elevate the game beyond the daily bladder maintenance of the first game—but more on that later.

### IN THIS HOUSE THAT I CALL HOME

Once you've created your Sim or whole Sim family, it's time to move into one of three sprawling neighborhoods—or a custom one



Use the facial construction tools to create your own Steven Tyler or some other Aerosmith goon. Or maybe something a little more human.



Have your talented Sims paint portraits of beloved family members before they shuffle off this mortal coil.

## WHAT CITY OF HEROES DID FOR COSTUME CREATION, THE SIMS 2 DOES FOR CHARACTER CREATION.

created by you, including landscapes you've created in *SimCity 4*. Building homes continues to be one of the game's countless charms, and the tools have been upgraded to make it even easier; for example, you can use a room-building tool to quickly lay out a basic four-sided room instead of laying down each wall individually. The building interface, as well as the purchasing interface, lets you sort things quickly by type or room (i.e., you can click on Flooring and open up submenus, or you can click on Bathroom and then a Flooring submenu to open a selection of appropriate choices). It's all pretty well organized, but there are some mental lapses—why aren't cribs and changing tables in the Children's Room option instead of under Miscellaneous/Kids? I had Sims abandoning babies on kitchen floors for the night and tossing dirty diapers on the floor until I stumbled across those hidden items.

There's a ton of stuff to buy and use to customize your home, and you should expect roughly a *Citizen Kane*'s basement-sized amount of user-made items, paint schemes, carpeting, clothing, and more to be available about three minutes after the first *Sims 2* box hits a store shelf. You'll have ample opportunity to play with all that stuff since *The Sims 2* essentially includes a house-building sandbox mode. You can build to your heart's content on any empty lot, the amount of building and furnishing you do setting the home's price should you decide to move a family into it later. □



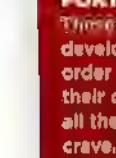
# ASPIRATIONS

## FAMILY



This is the easiest aspiration for jacking up Aspiration points. The Family Sim just wants to flirt with their spouse, read to the kids, and have more kids. The constant breeding and growing family are the real challenges here: The more Sims in the house, the harder they are to manage.

## FORTUNE



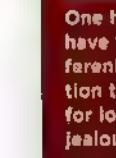
These money-grubbers need to develop their skills fully in order to rise to the top of their careers so they can buy all the high-end stuff they crave. Pair a Fortune Sim with a Family Sim: One works while the other stays home and maintains the social network needed for career advancement. Just a little quality time every night will keep the Family Sim happy so the Fortune Sim can spend off-hours developing skills.

## POPULARITY



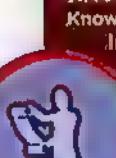
This one's tough—keeping up friendships in *The Sims 2* is tough enough without basing all your gameplay around it. Still, if you master throwing parties, you'll succeed and can rise to the top of the lucrative Athletics or Politics career tracks.

## ROMANCE



One high-end Romance want is to have "woo-hoo" with three different Sims—this is the aspiration to take if you're looking for lots of drama because jealousy, heartbreak, and rage walk hand-in-hand with all that canoodling. Pair a Romance Sim with a Family one and watch the SimKiddies get emotionally scarred from all the fighting and breakups.

## KNOWLEDGE



Knowledge Sims have the weirdest want in the game: They want to be saved from death. The burning desire for self-improvement forces these Sims to study all the time, thus making it hard to fulfill their other basic needs. Thankfully, items like the chessboard or telescope let these Sims improve skills while enhancing their social or fun needs.



Plucky and Flappy Antuckie, America's original fun couple, get down. Soon they will be making babies.



### SEX AND DYING IN HIGH SOCIETY

Obviously, you can play with a single Sim, but the focus in *The Sims 2* is squarely on the family, and you'd really be cheating yourself if you never explored that dynamic. The Bladder, Social, Hunger and other needs of the first game have been dramatically rebalanced this time, so they require far less attention, freeing you to play with the daily drama of your Sim's life. Further, the auto-management A.I. is much better as well, so you can focus on one or two Sims in a household with relative confidence that no one else will let themselves starve to death.

There really aren't words—or enough pages in this magazine—to describe how captivating the complexities of family life are in this game. In a dramatic break from the stagnant time stream of the first game, every Sim in *The Sims 2* ages and matures, passing from baby to toddler to teenager to adult

to elder to a nice little urn full of ashes. While there are some ways to cheat Father Time, the finite life span of every Sim makes each of your decisions crucial, especially since every event or action in the game has an emotional consequence that will affect and shape your Sims. Families have to operate as a unit to thrive. If someone isn't serving dinner to everyone, if someone isn't housebreaking the toddler, if someone isn't getting enough rest to succeed at work, everyone suffers: The children grow up angry and unhappy, parental relationships fail, and so begins a cycle of misery that's really tough to break.

### WE'RE HAVING MUCH MORE FUN

As tough as that may sound, it's not all that hard to get the hang of it, and there are plenty of rewards you can treat both yourself and your Sims to. About those aspirations—each Sim's life aspiration generates a frequently changing list of four wants and three fears. Meeting

## THE SIMS 2 IS HUGE, AND YET IT IS COMPOSED OF THOUSANDS OF LITTLE MOMENTS AND DELICATE TOUCHES.



■ The Slaphead family cheers as the law wrassles with a burglar.



■ Why Is Audrey Delfino so happy? Because she just got a job promotion, that's why.

## REAL CHILD OF HELL

Having a baby in *The Sims 2* is not like having one in real life...too much like having one in real life, in fact. Forget the tiredness, nagging hunger, and open-hose constipation of a *Sims 2* pregnancy. It's when those little brats pop into the world in a wholly misleading shower of confetti and fireworks (which makes it look like a celebration of things) that life nosedives right into the crapper. As infants, SimBabies are unknowable caterwauling hellspawn. Are they hungry? Do they need attention? Maybe a fresh diaper? Maybe, or maybe they're just hateful beasts. At any rate, they will utterly destroy the sleep patterns and daily routines of the Sims you've so lovingly managed up to that point. Dead tired, your Sims will see their friendships deteriorate from lack of attention; their careers stall (if they're lucky enough to avoid demotion), and their persistently red Fun meters glow angrily. Sadly, just like in the original *Sims*, your virtual creations cannot stick their heads in the oven, no matter how desperately they want to.

As babies mature into speed-crawling toddlers, your strategies again as in real life, focus on containment. Small and too quick to easily click on, toddlers will make a beeline to the bathroom for a bit of toilet clogging—if they're not eating garbage or thinking about playing with the stove. When the Arbuckle twins, Filmy and Floppy, made toilet destruction their daily ritual, I made moving the toy chest to block off the bathroom mine. And while an iron maiden would've been nice, the crib and high chair serve as suitable baby imprisonment devices. My advice? Never teach 'em to walk. What's so bad about a teenager that crawls everywhere anyway?



■ An old lady plays pinball in her underwear. Does it get any sweeter than that?

There's a fine line between life... and disc death.

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• In *The Sims 2*, Sims don't just play videogames—they play EA's own SSX 3. • Offspring in *The Sims 2* carry their parents DNA—so pity the poor Arbuckle twins, Floppy and Flimsy. And pity the nanny as well—she has to look at these freaks all day. • Oh, dear God, no!



• these wants—having a baby for a Family Sim or buying a really expensive statue for a Fortune Sim—drives up an Aspiration meter and garners Aspiration points. These points can be spent on things like the Thinking Cap (for faster learning), the Money Tree (for faster earning), or the Elixir of Life (to reverse aging). There's a variety of these items, all whimsical, all worth trying at least once, all with potential drawbacks.

Unlike the first game's endless seven-day workweek, *The Sims 2*'s workweek has two days off scheduled for every job in every career track, as well as a pool of accruing vacation days. These times off are great opportunities to shore up lagging needs, fulfill a bunch of wants, or just take a trip downtown. That's right, every neighborhood comes with community lots where your Sims can go on dates, buy new clothes, play videogames, or even visit a water park.

#### SEE HOW WE ARE

Recognizing the overwhelming desire of die-hard players to share their experiences, the game offers two different types of photo albums for creating stories. In fact, players can set up a number of predetermined camera positions within a home in order to capture those magic moments at just the right angle. Even better, up to 30 seconds of video can be captured during the game—perfect for preserving a Sim's first kiss or fiery death.

The game isn't without its rough edges.



## EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD COMES WITH COMMUNITY LOTS WHERE YOUR SIMS CAN GO ON DATES, BUY NEW CLOTHES, PLAY VIDEOGAMES, OR EVEN VISIT A WATER PARK.

Loads can take a long time on slower machines, the framerate can drop at times, and occasionally commands in your queue vanish, which is aggravating. The most frustrating thing I encountered was the obsessive A.I. navel-gazing that constantly drove my Sims to write in a diary instead of doing other things like, oh, feeding their screaming baby. I don't understand why the A.I. renders an adult incapable of serving dinner to his family, instead opting to feed only himself. Since Serve Meal is a selectable menu option, why can't Sims select it on their own? And with such a game-wide emphasis on customization, why can't you choose the default clothing for your Sim's kids?

These concerns, while not minor, are overwhelmed by all that is great in a game that may well be the definitive "just one more turn" title. *The Sims 2* is huge, and yet it is composed of thousands of little moments and delicate touches, like the actual chess games Sims play against each other; the slovenly, splayfooted gait and poor posture of untidy Sims; the nighttime spooning of a slumbering couple; the brilliantly animated cops-and-robbers games kids play; the stolen moments of warmth between parents besieged by rampaging toddlers. *The Sims 2* is as big as life and as consuming. At heart, and with heart, it is a masterpiece. ■

## IS IT EVEN A GAME?

Can you win?—the detractors sniff. Is it if the lack of an end boss made *The Sims* ineligible for gamedom and their intellectual consideration. These small-minded snobs argued themselves right out of appreciating the most innovative game of the last decade. While developers ape the allegedly "open-ended" gameplay of *Grand Theft Auto*, *The Sims* games have delivered gameplay in which the player determines not only the methods to success, but the goals as well. Satisfying a goal is at the heart of every game, whether it's defending an alien base or killing a giant monster. Goals, long-term and short, constantly present themselves in *The Sims* series, and meeting those shifting demands is a nonstop challenge. Where failure in most every other game results in restarting a mission or reloading a save, failure in *The Sims 2* affects the entirety of each character's personal existence/game and can ripple throughout the game world to alter the games of other characters. If that's not a game—if that's not an amazing game—then I don't know what is.



### Verdict



Won't change the minds of *Sims* haters, but for fans, it's a triumph.

# Gary Grigsby's WORLD AT WAR

"This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by eleven o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you that no such understanding has been received and that consequently this country is at war with Germany." -British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, 3 September 1939

## KEY FEATURES

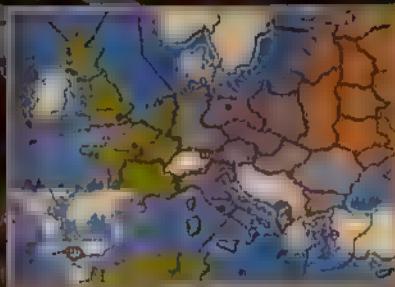
- \* Four full-length scenarios (Spring '40, Summer '41, Spring '42, Summer '43) lasting to the end of the war
- \* Over 350 areas on a sprawling world map
- \* Five playable forces (Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, the Western Allies and China) and 38 different countries
- \* Command fifteen different combat units in the air, on the land, and at sea, as well as infrastructure and supply units
- \* Each unit has up to 14 attributes, most of which can be improved through research and development
- \* Rules that cover strategic movement, forts, cold weather zones, airborne attack, amphibious invasions, partisans, militia, and many other features
- \* Fog of War rules that hide enemy units and production
- \* Supply rules that can be set to provide a common pool for all units to draw from, or the creation of field units that must accompany the armies
- \* PBEM playability for two to five players
- \* Challenging AI that offers a unique gaming experience
- \* Ability to automate either or both the Production and Research functions
- \* An in-depth tutorial that smoothly integrates the player with the game

Not even one year before these words were uttered, Chamberlain himself returned from Munich and uttered the words, "I believe it is peace in our time." As German bombers and aircraft poured across the border into Poland, slicing a sovereign nation into digestible conquest, Chamberlain was forced to acquiesce to the inevitable and declare war. France followed soon after, and World War II began.

Inevitably, the mighty Axis armies eventually bit off more than they could chew, and soon were bowing under the enormous pressure applied to them by the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. China, despite being at war with Japan for almost 14 years by 1945, proved to be too big a challenge for the Japanese; combined with increasing Allied pressure throughout the Pacific, the Japanese soon followed the Germans into defeat in the summer of 1945.

But with Gary Grigsby's *World at War*, things may turn out different. The Western Allies may be conquered by Germany, or Japan may defeat China. With you at the controls, leading the fates of nations and alliances, anything is possible in this new strategic offering from Matrix Games and 2 by 3 Games.

Lead your armies to victory by honing their abilities in research and development, creating a more powerful force than any other on the planet. Build with foresight, however; the bigger and more expensive units take longer to build and are invested in over time rather than being an instant purchase. Players will then have to plan several game turns in advance, tailoring far-reaching strategies to fit the current strategic situation.



Take command in this dynamic turn-based game and test strategies that long-past generals and world leaders could only dream of: make it happen in *World at War*.

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# Reviews

Making the world safe for mouth-breathing loners one month at a time



Odds are often ridiculously against you. Here, I've got a single captured panzer to stop all these enemy tanks and troops from holding the town.

**Platform:** PC **Developer:** Codemasters **Genre:** Small-Squad Tactical Combat **ESRB Rating:** T **System Requirements:** Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 20B install, broadband Internet for multiplayer **Recommended:** Pentium 4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard **Multiplayer:** Internet, LAN (2-4 players)

## Soldiers: Heroes of World War II

So much better than the last *Commandos* game



One of my Shermans keeps this Tiger occupied while the other moves into position to decap him.



Use of commandeered enemy ordnance is key: My boys repaired and rearmed this captured Tiger for the cause.



When my lone T-34 breaks through this defensive line, it's going to RULE!



Generally, we tend to highlight the good games here. Except right now

80



There's more than one way to skin a cat, and they're all more fun than this

81



More fun than a swift boat full of monkeys!

64

**T**here are two kinds of difficulty in electronic games: "good difficulty" (which is challenging) and "bad difficulty" (which leads you to snap the CD in half in frustration and curse the developers' misbegotten offspring). *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* has both. But when the good difficulty of *Soldiers* becomes bad, it's not exactly the gameplay that's at fault—it's what's missing from it.

What is there, however, is outstanding: There are more than 30 missions commanding Soviets, Brits, Americans, and Germans—each side with its own faithfully modeled equipment, from mobile artillery to hand grenades (although you might want to grab a 1944 edition of *Guns & Ammo* because the woefully slim manual lacks any descriptions). The game engine is awesome, allowing you to destroy virtually anything, and despite some framerate problems, it looks just gorgeous. Plus, while *Soldiers* is fundamentally a small-squad RTS à la *Commandos*, the designers added a nifty "direct control" system that permits manual takeover of any unit at any time. This gives the game a visceral element often lacking in the genre.

#### HARD TIMES

But while direct control works great for handling a single unit (tanks and gun emplacements, in particular, are outrageously fun to get your hands on), you'll frequently be commanding more than just one, and that's where the problems begin. There aren't enough hotkeys (not even quicksave!) for managing the task load. Worse, your troops will commonly be spread throughout big, elaborate maps, but there's no way of knowing if they're under attack unless you're looking right at them. There's nothing quite as maddening as painstakingly sneaking a soldier past an enemy defensive perimeter only to scroll back and find that the rest of his squad has been silently annihilated. All this is compounded by the fact that there's no way to issue orders or even select different units with the game paused, a feature that should be standard in this genre. There is a "slow-motion" function (which makes for some awesomely cinematic sequences), but even slowed down, war is frickin' fast; switching back and forth between units in the middle of a firefight ain't easy and can become really annoying really quickly.

However, the most frequent frustration is that *Soldiers* tends to be rather, oh, circumspect in letting you know what you're supposed to do next, or more often, how in the hell you're supposed to do it. One mission objective essentially reads, "Find some way to signal the rescue plane." Now, I appreciate the figure-it-out-yourself angle, but I could have used a neighborly head start into the extended ritual necessary to hail that damn pilot.



The game engine does a great job of rendering both idyllic scenery and the devastation of war.

## When all cylinders are firing, *Soldiers* is an absolute blast.

#### GREAT EXPECTATIONS

If this all sounds like I'm coming down rather hard on *Soldiers*, it's only because these problems are the clay feet of an otherwise golden statue. Make no mistake: When all cylinders are firing, *Soldiers* is an absolute blast. If you're a stickler for detail, get ready to be blown away. From the lifelike rumbling of the various tanks' engines to the way you can shoot off (and then pick up and put on) enemy soldiers' helmets, it's apparent that the designers sweat the small stuff.

Enemy A.I. is solid, making good use of cover, combined arms, and its perpetual numbers advantage. The missions, while hard, are always well constructed; the sometimes ridiculous odds the game puts you up against make it all the more satisfying when you grind your muddy Rick James boots into the enemy's new suede couch. Even the supplemental features are well done: The enjoyable original score differs in style depending on which country you're playing, and the faux History

Channel mission briefings give the whole experience a sense of authenticity.

#### OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Adding to the fun is a cooperative multiplayer mode that allows up to four buddies to give one another a hand against the A.I. This addition could have been even cooler if the game offered a simple matching service. So if you, like me, have no friends, you'll be reduced to soliciting partners on the forum boards. Also, there's no saving in multiplayer, which tends to amp up the frustration.

Still, *Soldiers* is full of that "good difficulty." While it lacks the polish of releases from major studios, it's a great game: unforgiving, unapologetic, and just fun.

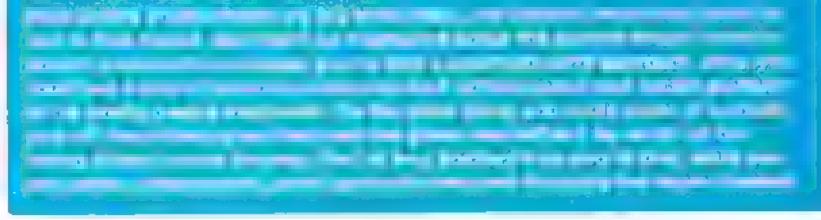
—Eric Neigher

#### Verdict



A little rough around the edges, but if you like a challenge, you'll love it.

## THE ART OF WAR





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PUBLISHER Activision DEVELOPER Fizz Factor/Amaze Entertainment GENRE Action-Adventure ESRB RATING E REQUIRED Pentium III 800MHz, 128MB RAM, 827MB install, 16MB videocard RECOMMENDED None MULTIPLAYER None

# Spider-Man 2

**With a great license comes great disappointment**

**R**emember back in the old days, like last month, when we complained that we didn't want to play ports of console games? Well, we take that back. If the original PC games are going to be as bad as this one, then please, give us the ports instead. Because this game just feels like an insult. Or maybe a practical joke.

To coincide with the *Spider-Man 2* movie, Activision has simultaneously published two *Spider-Man 2* games: one for the consoles and one for PC. The console game is a big-budget, smartly designed action-adventure with GTA-style openness and freedom. The PC version, though cleverly (or, some might say, deceptively) packaged in a nearly identical box, is actually a totally different game, from a different developer. Why? Because those who would play a *Spider-Man* game on the PC, in Activision's mushroom-fueled world view, must be little kids. So what we have here is a kiddie version of *Spider-Man 2*, with dumbed-down controls and simplified gameplay.

Not that there's anything wrong with kids' games. Some of us have kids. Some of us still are kids. But a kids' game that sucks? A kids' game that takes, at best, six hours to finish? That just makes us mad.

## SPIDER BITES

You know you're in for a bad time right away, since the game opens with a spectacularly slapdash, poorly rendered cut-scene that essentially begins in midscene and then ends in midscene, as if they forgot to finish it or maybe didn't care. It's also from a point about an hour into the movie, with none of the characters introduced or explained—so unless you've



No silly free-roaming swinging for PC Spider-Man! We get web targets!

**This game just feels like an insult. Or maybe a practical joke.**

seen the film, you won't have any clue what's going on.

Anyway, it doesn't really matter, because you are immediately transported away to an unrelated tutorial area, where the basic controls are snarkily explained by Bruce Campbell, who, even for him, is seriously slumming here. Not that you'll need a tutorial. Can you click your mouse buttons? Congratulations: You are now a PC *Spider-Man 2* expert.

Unlike the console game, which features a robust set of upgradeable combat and webslinging moves, the PC version offers only rudimentary controls from start to finish. Combat is limited to a punch and a jump kick, with a couple of basic long-range web attacks. All of which is more than enough for the game's brain-dead enemies, none of whom pose any challenge whatsoever. Webslinging, so awesome on the consoles, has been stripped bare here: You can swing



He's Puma, he's fierce, get used to it.

only to designated targets onscreen.

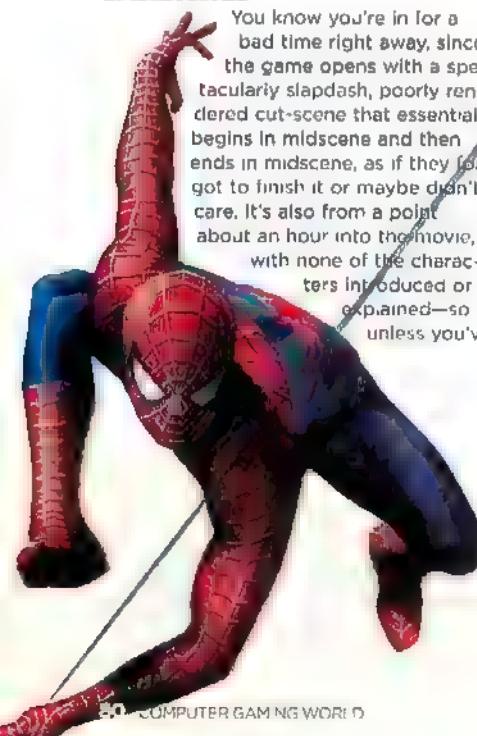
The game's few levels, before it's all mercifully over, offer a listless assortment of easy combat and easy jumping puzzles, as well as a few easy boss battles with random *Spider-Man* villains that have nothing to do with the movie, including the ever-popular Puma, who appears to have been watching lots of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

My "favorite" boss battle, however, was with Mysterio, because I got to throw rocks at him. And, you know, that's what I always dreamed of doing as *Spider-Man*, ever since I was a little boy throwing rocks at bad guys.

Are we done here? □ Jeff Green

## Verdict

The consoles get the cool *Spider-Man* game. We get the lame kids' version.



PUBLISHER Electronic Arts DEVELOPER Electronic Arts GENRE Action FSR: RAT/NG T REQUIRED: Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 1.5MB install, 64MB videocard  
RECOMMENDED Gamepad, some sort of mental disorder MULTIPLAYER None

# Catwoman

## Nine lives too many

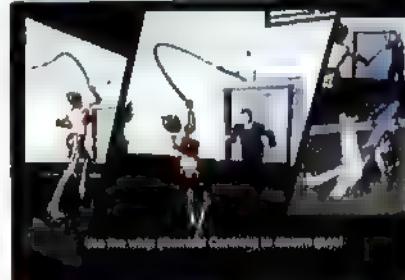
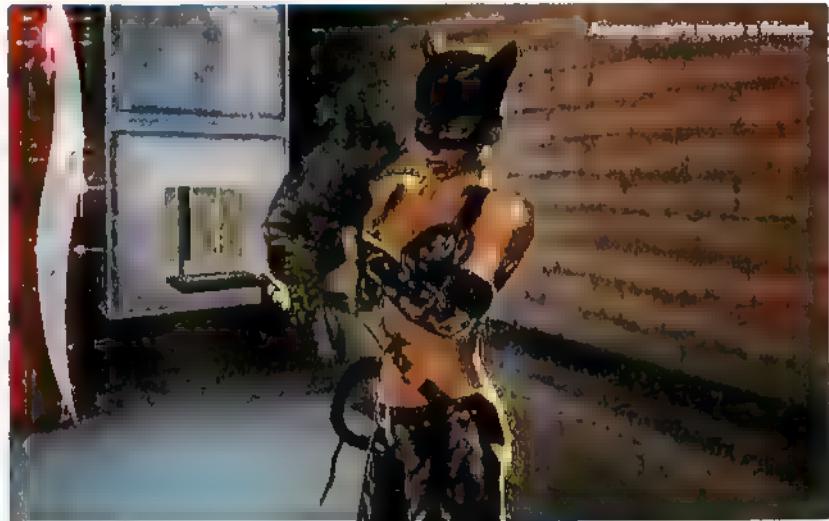
A prolific DC Comics writer once shared an amusing anecdote on a message board I frequent. DC, as many of you probably know, is the comic book division of Warner Bros. Studios. One day, the writer in question was introducing himself to one of the suits from the studio's film division; upon being asked what he did at Warner Bros., the writer replied that he wrote for DC Comics. The suit came back at him with a puzzled "Oh, we still publish comics?" This, sadly, is the type of person who makes the movie decisions at WB. The studio's films, naturally, lead to tie-in games, and that's how we get crap like *Catwoman*, an epic disaster of a game derived from a movie that simply shouldn't exist in the first place.

### KITTY LITTER

Like the movie that spawned it, *Catwoman* has nothing to do with Catwoman. The sultry Selina Kyle, occasional love interest of Batman and prostitute-turned-high-society-dilettante-turned-cat-burglar, is nowhere to be found here. Instead, we're stuck with the uninspired Patience Phillips, who returns from the dead as a vengeance-seeking leather fetishist after being murdered by her colleagues for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. She enacts said vengeance by running around the city, falling off buildings, stealing stuff, and kicking people into Dumpsters when they start glowing yellow. If there's more of a story to it than that, somebody forgot to include it.

You'll wander around a dozen or so badly lit areas, including a jewelry store, a nightclub, and a factory, as you progress through the game. And you'll do it without the benefit of a decent camera, since the developers apparently abandoned that along with the story. Aside from a slightly helpful first-person-view mode, you're stuck with camera angles that are often awkward and frustrating, and are made even worse by the game's perpetually dark scenery and thoroughly confusing level layouts.

When you do manage to figure out what's going on, you'll spend most of your time climbing up walls, hanging on to poles, swinging around on your whip, and probably falling down and starting



Yes, you'll use your whip to "disarm guys."



This is what you're paying 40 bucks for, folks.

## An epic disaster of a game derived from a movie that simply shouldn't exist in the first place.

the process all over again—it's like *Prince of Persia* gone bad. Every now and then, a few thugs will show up and attack you. After you flail about at them with the horrendously implemented combat controls, they will thoughtfully throw themselves into the nearest Dumpster, since they obviously know you're going to have a hard time doing it yourself. A word of advice: If you're going to subject yourself to this, at least use a gamepad.

*Catwoman* is one of the worst games you are ever likely to play. When you aren't falling to your death or spending your

hard-earned loot on special moves that do absolutely nothing, you'll be enjoying such Halle Berry-voiced witticisms as "I'll claw my way to the top!" and "What's that my cat eye spies?!" Fortunately (more like sadly), you can treat yourself to a bunch of cheesy T&A close-up poses by leaving your controller idle for a few moments—that is, if you haven't thrown it through the screen. ■ Ryan Scott

### Verdict

It gets a star only because it actually runs when you install it.

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: KnowWander Studio/Amaze Entertainment GENRE: Action-Adventure ESRB RATING: E REQUIRED: Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM, 850MB install, 32MB videocard. RECOMMENDED: None

# Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

**Not very Harry, but still pretty fun**

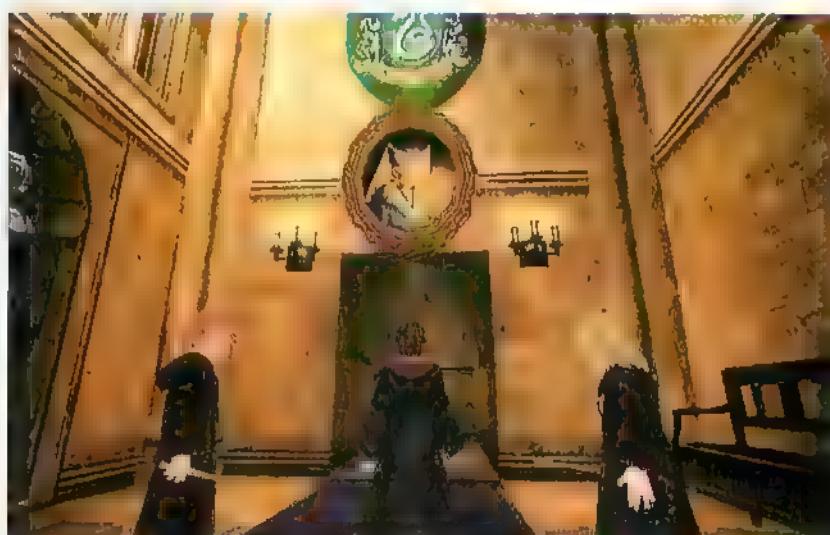
If you haven't read *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* or seen the movie, this game is not the place to learn what it's all about. That doesn't mean it's bad. It's actually pretty fun. It's just not very *Harry*.

#### NO FANCY BOOK LEARNIN'

For Harry Potter sticklers who tolerate no changes from JK Rowling's books, there is a lot to complain about here. The entire first part of the book is missing (starting on the Hogwarts Express rather than at the Dursleys' house), Hogsmeade is missing, and many of the major characters, including Sirius Black, the prisoner in the story's title, are barely explained at all. You probably won't understand what's going on if you don't know the story already.

But the game isn't really about the story, and if you can get over that, you can have a good time. It's more about exploring Hogwarts, collecting goodies and finding secret areas, and beating a series of challenges and minigames. Both Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley follow Harry around this time, and at different parts of the game, you will play as each of them, sometimes using all three at once to cast spells.

Spelling is fun and easy. Almost all of the spells were taken from the books, and some, like Rictusempra (used for defeating small enemies) and Depulso (which pushes and pulls things), are not the popular spells that everyone knows, which shows that the game makers really did read the book. Other spells, like



© Harry, Ron, and Hermione discover a secret passageway in Hogwarts.

We're not sure what playing as a rabbit has to do with *Harry Potter*, but we liked it anyway.

Draconifors and Lapifors, which make small statues turn into temporary live beings that you control, were not from the books at all but were still cool. We're not sure what playing as a rabbit has to do with *Harry Potter*, but we liked it anyway.

#### I'M JUST MILD ABOUT HARRY

Overall the spelling is fun but really too easy. Any time you needed to cast a spell, the right one was automatically chosen for you. It would have been more challenging and interesting if you could have experimented and tried to figure out the right one to use yourself.

This is actually true of the whole game. It's very easy, and if you beat everything on the first try (which Dad here failed to do), the game would be very short. It's only from

repeating things that the game takes any time at all. And the only part that we really got stuck at was trying to ride Buckbeak, the hippogriff, through a series of hoops, which almost had Dad break his keyboard in half out of frustration. Or, to let the younger half of this review team speak directly in her own words: "It probably isn't hard for most people, but for losers like my dad, it was very hard." Yeah. Thanks a lot. Go to your room.

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* looks great, does a nice job of re-creating Hogwarts, and is fun if you like exploring and finding secret areas. It's a good game, just not a good *Harry Potter* story. If you want to know about Harry Potter, read the book instead. ■ Sarah (age 10) and Jeff (age 42) Green



© Poor Ron Weasley dangles in midair. Can he panic now?

#### Verdict

For casual gamers and casual *Harry Potter* fans—diehards may be let down.

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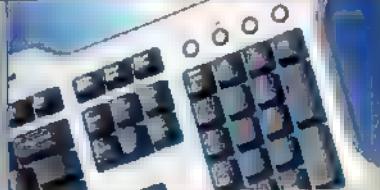


- > 9 Blue LED backlit buttons
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- > Comfortable wrist rest

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- > Thin, flat design

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- > Quiet responsive keys



**PC** PUBLISHER Ubisoft DEVELOPER Stardock Entertainment GENRE Political strategy CDRATE RATING T REQUIRED 1GHz Pentium III, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 750MB install, broadband Internet connection RECOMMENDED 2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM MULTIPLAYER Internet (2 players)

# The Political Machine

You don't vote for king



While a game about a presidential election is undoubtedly more interesting three months before the fact as opposed to three years, these kinds of games are usually either abstract strategy exercises with no basis in reality or dull political simulators interesting only to C-SPAN-watching insomniacs. The fact that *The Political Machine* manages to be both a reasonable facsimile of a presidential campaign and an absolutely absorbing strategy game that will keep you coming back for beating after beating is a testament to the design skills of a small developer called Stardock Entertainment, also responsible for last year's excellent *Galactic Civilizations*.

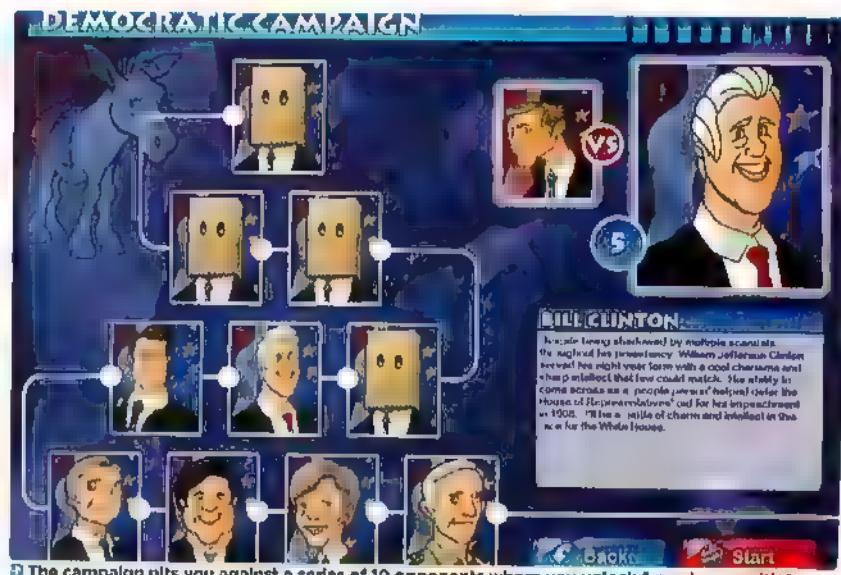
## SOLIDIFYING THE BASE

*The Political Machine* succeeds primarily because it concentrates on being a good strategy game rather than a strict political simulator. The game gives you the freedom to choose how to run your campaign, using an elegant game system that provides you with a lot of options while ensuring that you'll never be able to take advantage of them all—the basis of a successful strategy game.

Each campaign is divided into 41 turns, each representing a week. Candidates travel from state to state giving speeches; building organizations (headquarters); running radio, television, and print ads; and gaining endorsements from special-interest groups. The key is to frame the debate around issues where you agree with state or national opinion, while restricting the focus on areas where you're weak. For example, in a state where your opponent is soft on crime, you might give speeches about fighting crime to raise awareness on this topic. If you're weak on foreign-policy issues, you can get an endorsement from a foreign-policy think tank to bolster your position. While you're doing this, though, you won't be running ads or raising funds, because you only have so many action points to spend per week, and the choices are stark.

## CHARACTER ISSUES

Candidates are rated in a number of characteristics, such as integrity, compassion, experience, credibility, and stamina. Some of these are easy to understand (stamina determines how many action points you'll have



The campaign pits you against a series of 10 opponents whom you unlock for solo or multiplay.

A political campaign would be nothing without dirty tricks, and *The Political Machine* gives you a whole arsenal of them.

each week), while some are more nebulous (such as media bias). Unfortunately, the character-creation system is a bit broken due to several characteristics (stamina, experience and fund-raising ability—and to a lesser extent, starting money) being much more important than others. So creating your own characters for multiplayer isn't as interesting as it could be, since the choices there are pretty obvious.

A political campaign would be nothing without dirty tricks, and *The Political Machine* gives you a whole arsenal of them. You can hire smear merchants to lower an opponent's ratings in a state or use hecklers to increase their stamina cost—effectively giving them fewer actions in a turn. Some of the game's random events give you advantages (which occasionally prove unbalancing), like less costly ads or celebrity support to help raise your awareness in different states.



You can examine the exit polls to see how you did on each issue.

While the timeliness of the topic definitely enhances the game's appeal, the fundamental system would be interesting even if it were set on Mars. That's the mark of a good design and a worthy purchase. **Bruce Geryk**

## Verdict

★★★★½  
A great strategy game, even if you never watch the news.

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*Small Form Factor, Redefined*

# FragBox

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PUBLISHER CDV Software DEVELOPER: Stormregion GENRE RTS ESRB RATING T REQUIRED Pentium III 750MHz, 256MB RAM, 128MB videocard, 2.5GB install RECOMMENDED Pentium 4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 3GB install MULTIPLAYER Internet (2-4 players)

# Codename: Panzers

Suddenly, my humvee looks like a sissy car

Some games are all about the story, and some games are all about the pulse-pounding action. *Panzers* falls squarely into the latter camp. It's WWII—that's all you need to know. The story will fail to compel you, and the spoken dialogue will never seem quite right. The best writing in the game (and the only information worth paying attention to) comes in the form of the commander's Journal, which you get to look at between missions. Make no mistake: *Panzers* does no favors for the spoken word. But what it lacks in story, it compensates for with missions that make you want to trade in your beat-up Chevy for an M36 Slugger.

First things first: This game is all about tanks. Lots of tanks. As you blast through the German, Russian, and Allied campaigns, you will constantly be swallowed up by the sights and sounds of battle as your armored units thunder across the landscape, churning up dust. Earthshaking explosions bombard you in each chapter, engulfing your senses in the chaos and fire of war. These war machines shudder when hit by enemy fire and rock from the recoil of their massive guns. The graphics engine wonderfully renders detailed landscapes, from wide-open plains to ravaged cities with claustrophobic avenues, putting you in some of the most literate battles to grace a PC game.

## REMEMBER THE LITTLE PEOPLE

Though tanks are the main thrust of your army's might, your infantry units are invaluable when used correctly. In each level, they heighten the war-movie atmosphere, whether they are running alongside the tanks or lying in wait to snipe the enemy. They may be fragile in comparison to the armored behemoths, but foot soldiers can hole up in abandoned buildings or bunkers, shoot from cover, and take great advantage of the terrain. The various units also have different detection ranges and stealth abilities, making teamwork both rewarding and necessary. Snipers, for instance, can creep up close enough to put an enemy in their line of sight, making an excellent advance pair of eyes for your artillery, mortars, and tanks further away.

Troops cannot be replaced midmission, so you have to take care of them. You are either assigned your infantry, armored units, artillery, and support vehicles or forced to "buy" these units using prestige earned in previous missions. And that's pretty much it—no reinforcements until the



Pedestrians DO NOT have the right of way in Mother Russia.

**Codename: Panzers is all about tanks. Lots of tanks.**



Why invade Russia with two tanks? Because the rest are in a five-tank pileup on I-90.



When the Germans come to play, they invite all their friends.

next mission. In more challenging modes of play, fallen troops aren't replaced at all.

As great as *Panzers'* action is, some pretty wonky pathfinding issues mar the experience. Controlling large groups of vehicles tends to create armored traffic jams, this is a particularly frustrating problem in city environments, where myriad obstacles and buildings complicate the pathfinding problems even more.

If you're patient, don't really care whether the story is engaging, and just want to crank up the speakers and blow stuff up, you could do a lot worse than *Codename: Panzers*. **Stephen F. Gehring**

## Verdict

The pathfinding problems suck a lot of the joy out of this WWII tankfest.

PUBLISHER: Matrix Games DEVELOPER: 2by3 Games GENRE: Turn-based Strategic War Game ESRB RATING: None REQUIRED: Pentium II 600, 128MB RAM, 800MB install RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM MULTIPLAYER: Hotspot, PBEM (2 players)

# War in the Pacific

**Don't make any plans for the rest of this year**

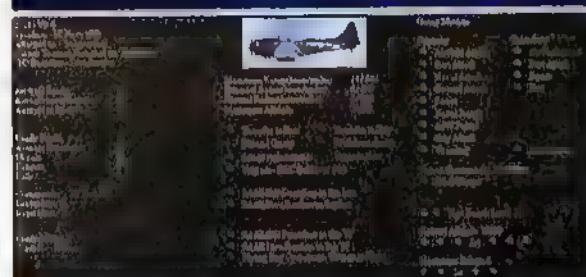
**W**ar in the Pacific is the long-awaited update to Gary Grigsby's landmark *Pacific War*, released in 1992. Two years ago, war gamers were treated to a preview with *Uncommon Valor*, a smaller-scale game depicting the battle for the Solomon Islands that used essentially the same game system. Preview or not, there is nothing that really could have prepared you for this.

The premise of the game is nothing less than being able to refight the battles of the Pacific theater of WWII in single-day turns, using just about every ship, plane, and ground formation that fought there. The map stretches from India to the west coast of North America, and units of battalion strength are rated for number and size of individual guns. Each turn cycles through numerous subphases, and you can find detail down to the individual commander level, with inspiration and leadership ratings for squadron commanders and ship captains. It even keeps track of kills on an individual pilot basis. The whole thing screams one design philosophy: detail über alles.

The problem with the game as a game is that while the important decisions are generally metastrategy (which bases to build up, how to construct your logistics network, etc.), the game also plunges you into a lot of detail that is unavoidable unless you turn entire sectors over to the A.I. That's not necessarily a problem if you see this more as a self-contained virtual world where you can completely immerse yourself in WWII's Pacific theater. Even so, because strategy takes game-years to



The game suffers from a lack of intermediate map views.



You want suffocating detail? You got it.

take shape, you can expect to get hundreds of turns into a game only to find you're doing it all wrong. It's an unforgiving game that demands dedication unlike anything seen before.

## GRUNT WORK

*War in the Pacific* isn't really so much a game as it is a project. The longest campaign scenario lasts almost 1,500 turns, and before you're anywhere near ready to handle that, you're well advised to spend time with several of the smaller scenarios. It will take you more time to read and absorb the material in the manual than it would to complete some other games. The familiar Grigsby interface is back—and comes up short time after time—but in a game of this scope that's almost irrelevant. If you make the decision to learn the game, you're going to have a lot more to



The A.I. can be set by sector, so you can concentrate on your favorite part of the war.

overcome than just nonmodal windows and inconsistently placed Exit buttons.

This title is essentially an MMO game for dedicated, hardcore war gamers, not in the massively multiplayer online sense, but simply because it lends itself to complete

immersion on a time-sink scale similar to *EverQuest*'s. To dismiss it as an impenetrable chore is to miss the point. The \$70 price tag is a clear warning sign: Casual players need not apply. For war gamers, the game requires total commitment. If you invest enough, you'll be amply rewarded. **Bruce Geryk**

## Verdict

**War in the Pacific answers the prayers of hardcore Pacific war reenactors.**

## WAR COLLEGE

If you're serious about getting into the game, you must read the \$24.99 manual (40 pages of which are devoted to detailing just two scenarios), as well as additional files, including the intro from producer and co-designer Bill O'Neil in the Unofficial *WWII Strategy Guide* at [mathubs.com/files/warpcguide](http://mathubs.com/files/warpcguide).

**This title is essentially an MMO game for dedicated, hardcore war gamers.**



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# YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

The days of huge desktop PCs and birds' nests of Ethernet cables are fading

 Watch any science-fiction movie and you'll notice that many of the items featured are simply smaller, sleeker versions of everyday products we already use. With the exception of *Blade Runner*, it seems that CRTs have gone extinct, their place having been taken by supersleek flat-panel monitors like those seen in *Minority Report* and *I, Robot*. Of course, these are movies that take place decades in the future. Just a few years ago, however, going "small" meant giving up performance, and as gamers, well, that's just not acceptable. Thankfully, there's a new movement afoot, and we're being treated to cool products that are both small and powerful. Whether it's VoodooPC's wickedly fast Envy M:860 laptop or Falcon's awesome new small form-factor rig, the FragBox 2, gamers are learning that we can take it with us—and it won't kill us, either.



MANUFACTURER Voodoo PC PRICE \$3,800

# VOODOO'S AWESOME DESKTOP REPLACEMENT

Voodoo Envy M:860



From its pure white paint job to its glowing blue power button, you can tell right away that this amazing notebook from

VoodooPC is going to be something special. For those who question the logic behind notebook gaming, this powerful beast should silence all objections; there's no reason for high-performance, high-quality multimedia to be left to the realm of the desktop PC. The Envy M:860 will live up to its name, turning heads wherever you unleash its awesome might.

Every tick in its spec sheet is impressive. The Envy is fitted with an Athlon 64 3400+ processor and an ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 graphics chip, which together should run just about any game on the market. Before you ask, we don't know how the Envy stacks up against *Doom 3*—the deadline for this article came before we got our dirty little hands on a copy of Id's long-awaited title.

The heavy laptop (it weighs in at about 8 pounds) has a huge and wonderful 15.4-inch widescreen display that's crisp and sparkingly clear in Windows and while displaying games at any resolution. The touchpad, which has a handy scroll pad on the right side, matches the display's aspect ratio. One of our few complaints concerns mousing: Even with the mouse motion set to maximum, the mouse cursor was sluggish, requiring repeated drags of our fingers on the touchpad to get that damn arrow across the screen. Of course, any gamer worth a damn will attach a USB mouse to this puppy, which is exactly what we did.

Otherwise, the ergonomics are stellar. The keyboard is snappy and responsive,

with good tactile feedback. In a cool twist, the LEDs for things such as Num Lock and Caps Lock are a cool, icy blue rather than the mundane pale green used by most PC manufacturers.

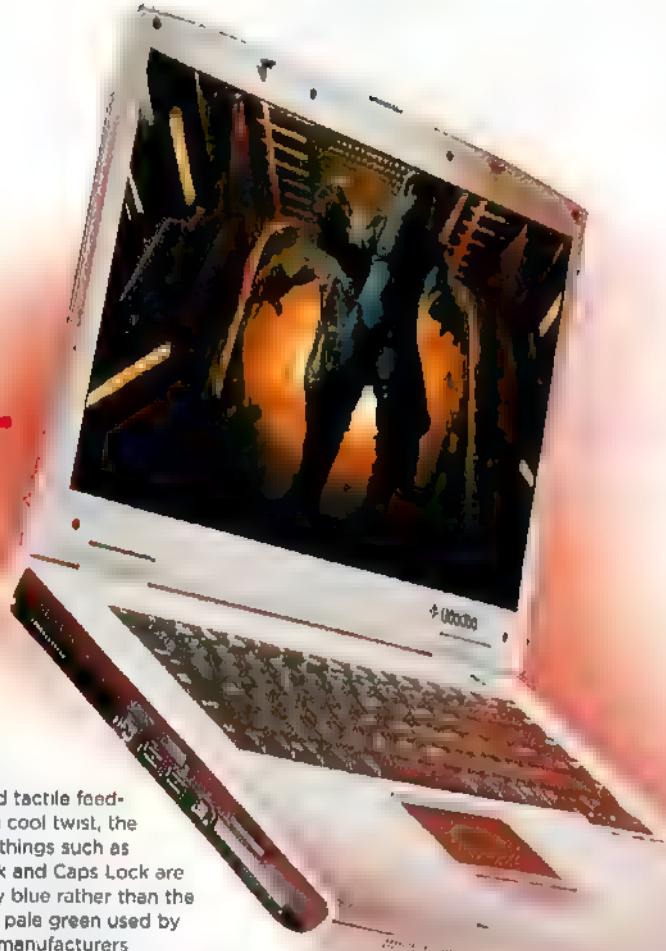
If you're away from an electrical outlet, you'll get about an hour and a half of high-performance gaming out of the Envy before the battery sputters to a halt. That's not bad, and it translates to at least two hours of battery life doing more mundane stuff such as e-mail and word processing.

If you plan on using the Envy for LAN fests, you'll be happy to know that it's network ready, with both wired and wireless Ethernet controllers built right in. Of course, besides convenience at a gaming gathering, you'll command bragging rights. This notebook is as close to a modder's dream as a notebook can be—complete with symbol-laden graphics on the top cover.

The Envy did a terrific job crunching system hogs such as *Far Cry*, *Halo*, and *Splinter Cell*. The Mobility Radeon 9700 may not be an X800, but it can certainly hold its own when it comes to gaming prowess. WASD warriors will get a charge out of its smooth framerates, and it's even powerful enough to bump up antialiasing and anisotropic filtering to match the quality of the rendering to the awesome LCD display.

If you choose to purchase a gaming laptop, be warned: Most laptops aren't upgradeable. Fortunately, Voodoo offers graphics card upgrades for the Envy. The Voodoo Envy M:860 is easily one of the gnarliest gaming laptops on the market.

—Joel Durham Jr.



**Of course, besides convenience at a gaming gathering, you'll command bragging rights. This notebook is as close to a modder's dream as a notebook can be—complete with symbol-laden graphics on the top cover.**

**SCORE:** ★★★★☆

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MANUFACTURER Falcon Northwest PRICE \$4,100

# FALCON'S ALL NEW FRAGBOX 2

Falcon Northwest starts from the ground up and builds an awesome "transportable"



In talking to Kelt Reeves (the outspoken owner of Falcon Northwest), I've come to realize that the original FragBox was in many ways an experiment. As with any experiment, one begins with a question. From there, you form a hypothesis before reaching a conclusion. The question with the FragBox may have been something like: "Can you play games (even demanding ones) with the current generation of small form-factor technology?" The hypothesis may then have been: "With enough power, can you expect to play games (even demanding ones) with a small form-factor rig?" And the conclusion probably sounded something like this: "The power supplies that ship with the current generation of small



form-factor boxes are not robust enough to handle the power needs that hardcore Windows gamers demand." The experiment concluded, and Reeves decided that the only way to go about this small form-factor trend was to start from the ground up. Enter the FragBox 2.

Rocking a 520-watt power supply and Intel's D925XBC PCIE/Socket T micro-ATX motherboard, the FragBox 2 isn't so much a small form-factor PC as it is a standard PC, only smaller. Where its predecessor lacked upgradeability, Falcon boasts that "the FragBox 2 now has the power to run any graphics card and processor combination possible." And this is a blessing to Windows gamers. In fact, the FragBox 2 is about as fast as a similarly configured Mach V.

In addition to a real power supply and superfast motherboard, the FragBox 2 boasts an Intel 3.6GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of Corsair DDR2 memory, dual 74GB Western Digital hard drives in a 150GB RAID 0 configuration, a Sony DVD/RW drive, a four-type media-card writer/reader, and, most important, a 256MB Nvidia GeForce 6800 Ultra PCI Express graphics card.

We put the FragBox 2 through our standard barrage of benchmarks, and boy, were we impressed. We tested it at 1280x1024 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on. Its 3DMark 2003 score of 5,899 is one of the highest we've seen. Furthermore, none of the games we threw at the machine challenged it. Hell, the FragBox 2 scored Doom 3 framerates of more than

62 frames per second at 1280x1024 with 4x AA and 8x AF.

Of course, at more than \$4,000 (as tested), the FragBox 2 is exponentially more expensive than the original \$1,000 FragBox (the FragBox 2 starts at around \$2,600). That said, this baby pulls no punches. Boasting the fastest graphics card and processor available, a RAID configuration, and a ton of memory, the FragBox 2 is a no-brainer for the gamer who wants a small machine that you can take with you. Oh yeah, it also comes with a pound of really good coffee.

■ William O'Neal

**SCORE:** ★★★★

**We put the FragBox 2 through our standard barrage of benchmarks, and boy, were we impressed. None of the games that we threw at this machine challenged it.**



MANUFACTURER: Actiontec PRICE: \$49.99 (54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router) \$199.99 (54 Mbps Wireless PC Card) [www.actiontec.com](http://www.actiontec.com)

## LOOK MA, NO WIRES!

Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router works like a charm.



If you've finally purchased that killer gaming laptop or you've set up a small-form-factor rig in another part of your house, seeing as it's 2004, any machine, regardless of how "badass" it may be, is nothing if it's not connected to your broadband network. Of course, there are a lot of ways to connect a machine to a network. But the \$100 question is, "How do you do it?" Well, you could run Ethernet cable all over your house by drilling holes in the floor and finally finding out what's in that crawlspace beneath your home, but whose wife is gonna allow that? The myriad CGW wives, for instance, ain't. The simplest solution is to set up a wireless network.

When it comes to broadband routers, most products (whether they're from D-Link, Belkin, Linksys, or Actiontec) are pretty similar. That said, there are differences in areas such as software bundles, security features, and ease of use. To that end, Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router turned out to be a great solution. Lately, I've been torn between Belkin and Actiontec products. Both companies offer similar items that



are simple to set up and affordable. Of course, there are differences. While Belkin's 54-Mbps wireless router connects to your existing DSL modem, Actiontec's product replaces it. At first, I was reluctant to replace my DSL modem (it has served me well for some time) with something new, but Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Router was simple to set up and has yet to let me down.

Setup was extremely simple. I connected the router to my DSL line, plugged it in, and then logged on to the router via the supplied IP address. I found Actiontec's Web-based setup utility (the installation buddy) to be a bit more difficult to figure out than Belkin's, but this is a learning curve issue that's easily overcome by...uh...reading the manual. Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router is 802.11g compliant and it's also backward compatible to 802.11b. The great thing about 802.11g products is that they'll even support older 802.11a items. In addition to its wireless features, the router also supports the 64-bit and 128-bit WEP encryption that's needed to ensure that your wireless network is good and secure. At around \$100, Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Cable/DSL Router is a great base with which to build a wireless network. —William O'Neal

**At first, I was reluctant to replace my DSL modem (it has served me well for some time) with a new product, but Actiontec's 54 Mbps Wireless Router was simple to set up and has yet to let me down.**

SCORE: ★★★★☆

# HOW TO INSTALL A WIRELESS ACCESS POINT

Internet access | Unplugged

**YOU'LL NEED** About all the standard networking stuff, plus you'll need something on your own network will be too. Wrong! Setting up a wireless network is super-easy, and we'll show you how to do it. For this How To, we used a Linksys E1200g Wireless Access Point, or WAP (around \$100), but you should be nearly there for any manufacturer's access point.

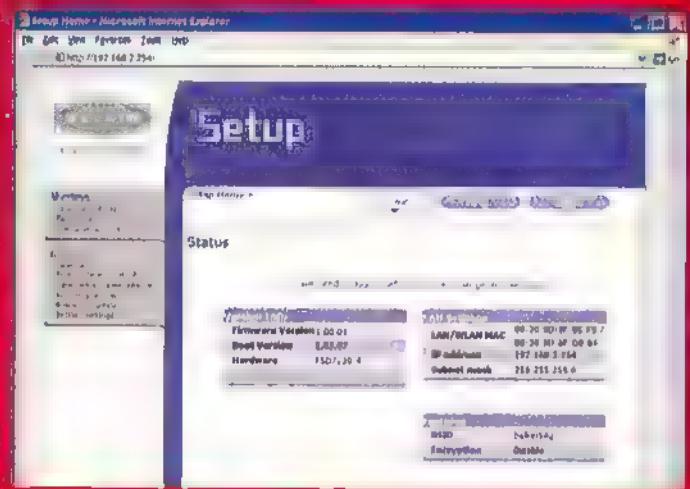


## LOG IN TO YOUR WAP

**STEP 2** Each manufacturer's WAP will require a different IP address in order to access the device's Web-based user interface that you'll use to configure the WAP. In my case I entered "192.168.2.254." Once you do this, you'll be able to set up those all-important security features. You don't want that eavesdropper down the street to use your bandwidth!

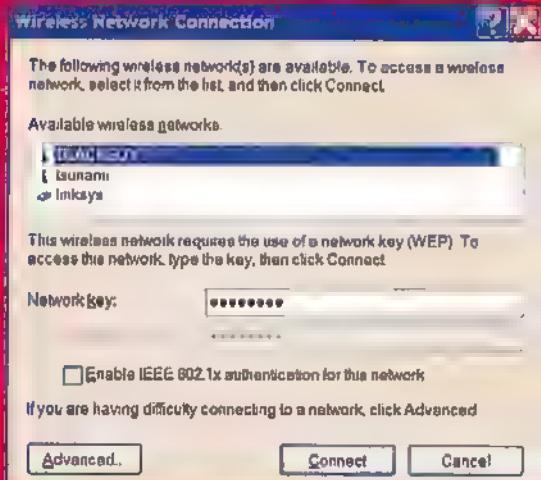
## CONNECT THE CABLES

**STEP 1** Locate an Ethernet port on the back of your broadband router and connect an Ethernet cable from that port to the one labeled either "Ethernet" or "LAN" on the back of your WAP. If the Ethernet port is "live," all the lights on your WAP should light up. Check your documentation to figure out what the various lights indicate.



## CONNECT TO YOUR NOW-SECURE NETWORK

**STEP 4** Right-click on the Wireless Network icon in the system tray and choose View Available Wireless Networks. Choose your wireless network; mine is called SLACKOUT, and enter that ridiculous, obscenely long WEP key that was generated with your password and hit Connect. Restart your machine and, barring any technical issues, you should be up and connected to your very own wireless network.



## WIRELESS IS ALL ABOUT ENCRYPTION

**STEP 3** Without encryption enabled, anyone can tap into your network and wreak all manner of mayhem. In the Setup screen, click on Encryption and use 128-bit. You're asked to enter a password that will be used to generate a WEP security key. Once your WEP key is created, be sure to record this information in a place where only you can retrieve it. Lose this information and you're screwed.

**AMERICAN EAST RUBBER AT THE PRICE \$399 (service charged by Bell to install card in new Insignia X650)**

# ATI'S LATEST MOBILE CHIP HANDLES DOOM 3

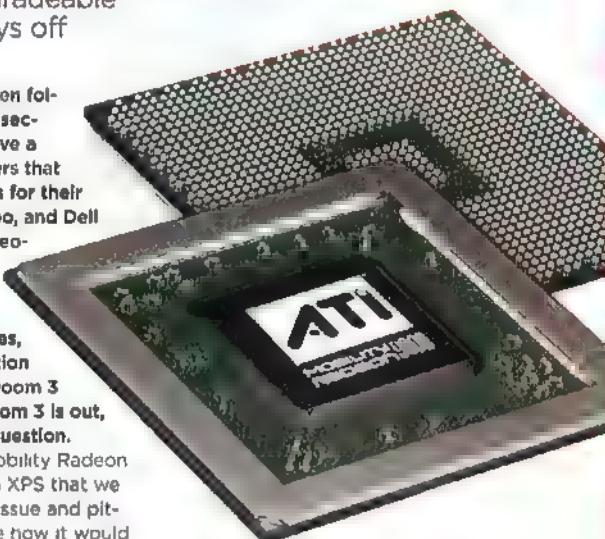
The promise of upgradeable mobile graphics pays off



**I** Anyone who has been following CGW's Tech section knows that I have a thing for laptop manufacturers that offer graphics-card upgrades for their machines—Alienware, Voodoo, and Dell come to mind. While most people agree that many of the so-called gaming laptops on the market are powerful enough to handle most games, there was always big question regarding the two biggies: Doom 3 and Half-Life 2. Now that Doom 3 is out we can answer part of that question.

We look at the 128MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9700-powered Dell Inspiron XPS that we reviewed in the September issue and pitted it against Doom 3 to see how it would fare. "Not too well" is the answer. Now keep in mind this machine is a beast with a 3.4GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor and 1GB of DDR memory. Only by knocking Doom 3's settings down to 640x480 and turning off every single visual detail were we able to achieve a benchmark score of 65 frames per second. This may sound OK, but remember, at these settings, the game is hideous. And this is where upgradeable mobile graphics come into play.

ATI recently released its 256MB Mobility Radeon 9800 graphics chip, and we had one installed in our Dell Inspiron XPS Sweet Jesus! Not only did this card fly in our benchmark and game tests, but most important, we were able to play Doom 3 at 640x480 with most of the visual details turned on at 66 frames per second, as well as at 800x600 at 45 framers per second. How does the Mobility Radeon 9800 do this? In additon to an



**Only by knocking Doom 3's settings down to 640x480 and turning off every single visual detail were we able to achieve a benchmark score of 65 frames per second.**

additional 128MB of memory, it rocks eight pixel pipelines (instead of four like its predecessor) and runs at an even higher clock speed. ■ William O'Neal

## BY THE NUMBERS

	<b>128MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9700</b>	<b>256MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9800</b>
<b>3DMark2003 Pro v. 340</b>	3,362	6,484
<b>AquaMark 2003</b>	31	45
<b>3DGameGauge 3.5</b>	60	73
<b>Cernache 4</b>	60	61
<b>Serious Sam: TSE</b>	97	115
<b>Dungeon Siege</b>	100	100
<b>UT2003 Bobmatch</b>	80	79



**Wii Power**

**His monthly spew of filth**

# Is there a ghost in the machine?

B

**B**eing a hardware enthusiast as well as a journalist means balancing the enthusiasm I have for things shiny and new with the skepticism that I'm supposed to rely on the same shiny and new objects to keep point-and-shoot cameras relevant.

When I first began to look at the machines, I was so impressed that I was quick to overlook many of their shortcomings. In my reviews, I mentioned that their weak power supplies meant that you were severely limited in your upgrade options, but so what, I thought. "They're still just as decent as ever."

In my excitement to play with something new, I overlooked a crucial aspect of these machines: Outright Voodoo and Falcon are known for building gaming machines from the ground up. After doing a ton of research, they pick the best components and put them together in machines that they stroke and nurture like brand-new babies. Building a machine based on a Shuttle XPC box means that you're going with Shuttle's case, power supply, and motherboard. While Voodoo and Falcon do their best to squeeze as much as possible from these boxes either way, you're getting Shuttle's or PIC's case, power supply, and motherboard.

Supposedly, the company was working on a test of the small-form-factor market. However, whether from dead power-supplies or other hardware incompatibilities, these machines are, at best, "quirky." Revising solid-state of FragBox, though, Falcon has now designed its own box from the ground up. For the FragBox 2, the company designed the case and chose the motherboard and power supply. If you bought an early small-form-factor machine, you may be wondering where the ghost is in the machine. I'm happy to say that what you're experiencing with that little baby is nothing more than old-fashioned showmanship. ■ William C. O'Neal

# Loyd's Cracked Case

**Small is beautiful**

**W**e recently reviewed VoodooPC's F50 "silent" PC that weighs 65 pounds. My back hasn't been the same since unpacking it from its box.

If you've ever moved a Dell XPS the muscles in your back probably went on strike, too. Sure, you need a big chassis if you're an overclocker, but we want something svelte that still runs *Far Cry* or *Doom 3* with wicked fast framerates.

"WTF? Svelte?" I can hear you cry. "Case has finally become a high-tech wimp, too old to lift a real man's PCI!"

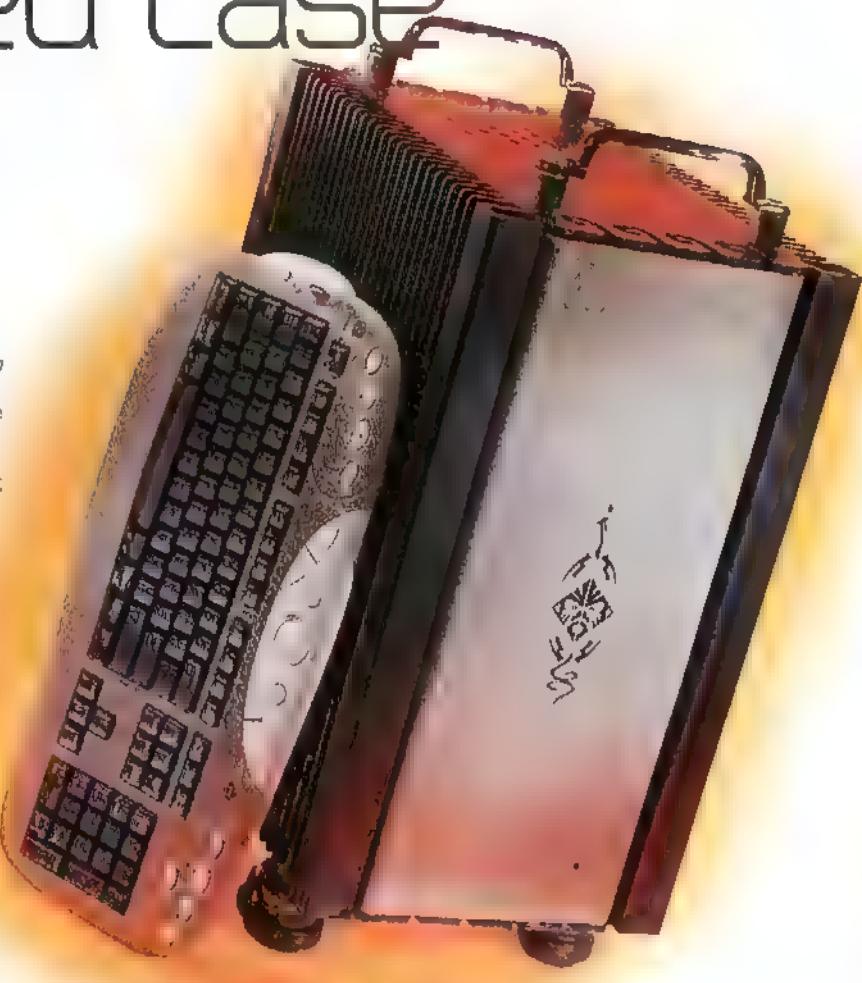
Next time you load that huge freakin' PC into your car for the local LAN party, I'll show up with an entire clan's worth of high-performance PCs. The small form-factor revolution is upon us.

## IS THAT A SHOEBOX IN YOUR...UH...BACKPACK?

I'm not talking about some pizza box piece o' crap with integrated graphics. I'm talking about those sleek, tiny cube-shaped PCs that have become all the rage. Taiwanese manufacturer Shuttle built the first cube-shaped PC, which the company has since dubbed the XPC. But other companies have weighed in with their versions of small form-factor systems. The salient feature of these PCs is performance in a tiny package. Most of these machines can accept the fastest CPUs.

The cramped quarters inside the small cases are not always friendly to high-end graphics cards, however. Double-wide cards, like Nvidia's GeForce 6800 Ultra, don't fit into many of these systems. Even if they do, they consume an additional slot space, which eliminates the possibility of having a PCI sound card. But you can still build them with really fast graphics cards—just not the two-slot behemoths.

**I'm not talking about some pizza box piece o' crap with integrated graphics. I'm talking about those sleek, tiny cube-shaped PCs that have become all the rage.**



And they're, well, cute. You can trick them out with different skins, get carrying cases for them, and the case modders have begun working their magic. Around the Case house, we have three of these babies humming along doing the yeoman's duties for my oldest daughter as well as fueling two of the gaming systems for the Friday Night Follies LAN parties. All of them are equipped with substantial graphics cards ranging from Nvidia's 5700 Ultra to ATI's Radeon 9800 XT. The sweetest of them sports a 2.8GHz P4. Performance is not an issue. Toss in an LCD flat panel with a sub-16ms response time and you've got a sweet semiportable gaming system.

## AH, THE WIRELESS REVOLUTION

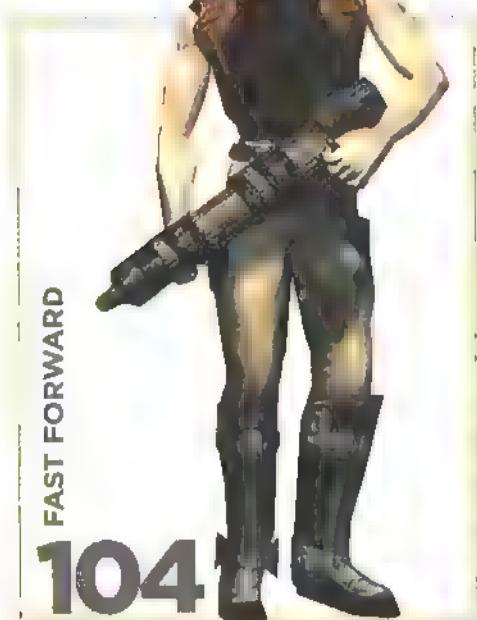
Many of these systems are being loaded up with wireless networking, too. Now all you need for a LAN party is a wireless router that connects to the Internet. Provided all the PCs are in close proximity,

latency and lag are not issues. Imagine a LAN party where you no longer have to lug miles of Ethernet cable and an Ethernet switch per table. You do have to be careful about performance, though. Some low-cost routers can theoretically handle 255 users, but if you try to actually have that many people connect, then it's lag city.

But what if you want to go even smaller? Wouldn't a laptop suffice? The answer is yes, sort of. You'll find that a machine that doesn't wrench your shoulder out of its socket when you pick it up will deliver only ho-hum graphics performance. However, the recent release of ATI's Mobility 9800 is a precursor of what's to come. Currently available only in "desktop replacements," we may see this type of performance in more mainstream laptops in a year or so as chip-manufacturing processes improve.

So dump those massive desktop PCs and heavy CRTs. You have nothing to lose but your chiropractor bills. **Q Loyd Case**

# Check Out



## Inside

What videocard should you buy for your next awesome computer? Who would play Darth Malak in a *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* movie? What's our favorite 1UP.com club this month? What the hell did we rate *Pax Romana*, anyway? These and other pressing questions are answered in this month's Check Out pages.

# Killer Rig

**For the gamer on a budget!**

 While last month's supersexy Power Rig was designed with the hardcore gamer in mind, this month's Lean Machine is designed for gamers on a budget. I know what you're saying: "How is a \$1,680 machine a budget rig?" Well, if you look at the tower alone—without the LCD and speakers—you'll see that this thing is mad affordable.

A month or so ago, I reviewed an iBuyPower.com machine that was \$1,000. That machine shipped with a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700LE. While that card sucked, the 128MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700 Ultra that I included in this machine is great for less-demanding games. For instance, iBuyPower's machine scored around 13 frames per second in *Halo* at 1280x1024, while my machine scored 26 frames per second at the same resolution. Of course, if you want to play *Doom 3* or *Half-Life 2*, you'll have to drop some serious coin on a more robust graphics card.

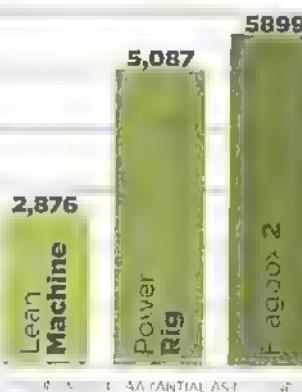
I debated making this machine an Athlon 64-based rig and decided to go the Intel route, since right now you can get these sub-3GHz Pentium 4 processors for next to nothing. And since most games rely mainly on the graphics card anyway, the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 is a great place to start when you're looking to build an affordable gaming rig. And that Intel D875PBZ motherboard is as solid as a rock. —William O'Neal

**If you want to play *Doom 3* or *Half-Life 2*, you'll have to drop some serious coin on a more robust graphics card.**

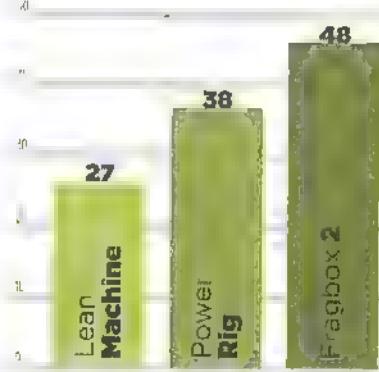


Anter  
Lanboy case

## 3DMark03 Pro



## AquaMark 2003



Viewsonic  
18-inch LCD monitor

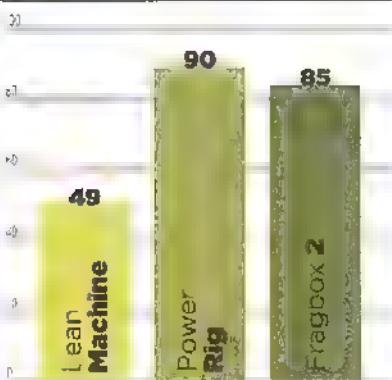


Logitech  
Z-2200 2.1  
speakers

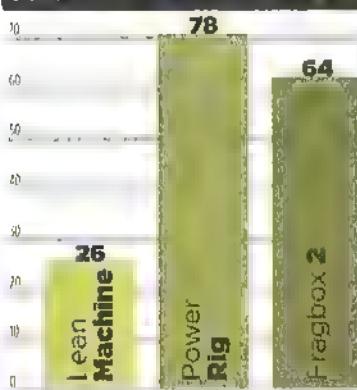


### The Guts

#### 3D GameGauge 3.5



#### Halo - Shader 1.0



MODEL	LEAN MACHINE	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	\$100
Case	Antec Lanboy	\$100
Processor (CPU)	Intel 2.8GHz Pentium 4	\$200
Motherboard	Intel DB75PBZ	\$100
Memory	512MB Kingston PC-5200 DDR	\$100
Hard drive	40GB Maxtor	\$80
Graphics processor	128MB GeForce FX 5700 Ultra	\$150
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	\$80
Optical drive	Sony DVD-RW	\$20
Monitor	Viewsonic 18-inch LCD	\$300
Keyboard/mouse	Microsoft Multimedia Keyboard	\$50
Speakers	Logitech Z 2200	\$100
<b>TOTAL COST</b>		\$1,680

# A-List

## Our picks



With the recent and upcoming releases of hot games like *Doom 3*, *Half-Life 2*, *The Sims 2*,

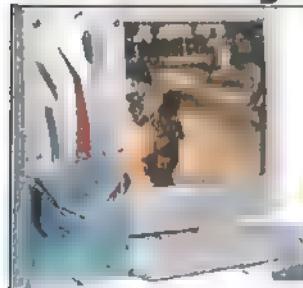
*Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, *Tribes: Vengeance*, *Star Wars Battlefront*, *Knights of the Old Republic II*, and *Call of Duty: United Offensive*, plenty of you are probably wondering whether you should upgrade your not-quite-awesome-but-still-gets-the-job-done computer. We're here to tell you: do it! Sure, these games look and play fine on a midrange rig, but let's face it—*Half-Life 2* is the kind of game you really want to upgrade your system for. And with the holidays practically right around the corner, you've got the perfect excuse to buy that attractive new videocard.



# COMPUTERS

If you're still on the fence about upgrading that old system of yours, you might want to take a look at recent prices—there are actually some decent, affordable rigs out there.

## Intel-Based systems



### PRODUCT

#### HIGH-END PICK

**Generation 3 Dimension XPS**  
\$3,699 (E-Value code GV411-XPS3REK)  
Dell

#### BUDGET PICK

**Back to School PC**  
\$1,000  
IBuyPower

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While Dell's first PCI Express-based machine isn't the fastest around, it's hard not to recommend it. With 1GB of DDR2 memory, 500GB of storage space, 5.1 speakers, and a killer 20.1-inch LCD, you're getting plenty of good stuff here.

This rig ships with a powerful processor (3GHz Intel Pentium 4) and a weak graphics card (256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5700LE), but since iBuyPower is a "build to order" outfit, you can easily tweak that configuration.

## Lanboy system



### PRODUCT

#### HIGH-END PICK

**FragBox 2**  
\$4,000  
Falcon Northwest

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Say hello to Falcon Northwest's FragBox 2. This box rocks a 520-watt power supply and a standard Micro-ATX Intel 925X-based motherboard—which means it doesn't suffer from the same upgrade limitations as its predecessor.

# PERIPHERALS

Speaking of *Doom 3*, it has some pretty eerie Dolby 5.1-enhanced audio effects. Make sure your speakers are up to par; it's well worth the cost.

## Speakers



### PRODUCT

#### HIGH-END PICK

- Creative GigaWorks S750 with DDTS-100 Decoder

\$75

Creative

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Creative's GigaWorks S750 speakers are simply awesome. The only catch is that they're specifically designed to go with a PC. Well, add the DDTS-100 Decoder to the mix and you have the ultimate home entertainment setup. With a ton of connection options, you can easily hook them up to your PC, consoles, and standalone DVD player.

#### MID-RANGE PICK

- Creative MegaWorks 2.1 250D

\$150

Creative

Good speakers are a must-have. The thing is, you may not want to compromise quality in order to get a surround-sound setup. In any case, the MegaWorks 2.1 250Ds are great. They are THX certified; plus, the subwoofer kicks.

#### BUDGET PICK

- Logitech Z-640

\$80

Logitech

If you absolutely have to have a surround-sound setup, then you'll like the Z-640s. They lack all of the connections that the Z-680s boast, but you'll still be pleased with the sound.

## Gadget



### PRODUCT

#### OUR PICK

- Creative Zen Touch

\$270

Creative Labs

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Creative's development model seems to be "wait for Apple to do something, then do it better." Hey, that's fine with us. The Zen Touch has a 10GB hard drive, 24 hours of battery life, USB 2.0 support, and plays both MP3 and WMA files.

# COMPONENTS

Ever see the inside of a computer case that hasn't been dusted out in five years? Let's just say that it isn't a pretty sight.

## Case



### PRODUCT

#### TOWER PICK

- TAC-T01-E1C

\$150

Cooler Master

### WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

This case is still our favorite, but because it's pretty heavy, it's not the best choice for the LAN-party crowd. Either way, though, its industrial design looks plenty cool.

#### ALTERNATIVE FORM-FACTOR

- Shuttle SB81P

\$300

Shuttle

Wimpy power supplies are a major problem for small form-factor cases. Shuttle hopes to fix this with the SB81P. Designed for what Shuttle calls "high voltage" computing, the SB81P boasts Intel's latest: the 915 chipset.

# Fast Forward

Welcome to Fast Forward, our monthly catch-all hodgepodge of PC-gaming randomness. This month: our dream cast for *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* and more!

# CASTING COUCH

We cast the *KOTOR* movie!



**Justin Theroux as Garth Onasi**

Oh boy—*Star Wars Episode III* has a name now! *Revenge of the Sith*! We're so not excited! While once upon a time this news might have made our geeky little hearts leap with joy, now, after suffering through two abominable movies, we just kind of want to curl up into a ball and cry. That's why we here at CGW are casting our own *Star Wars* movie: *Knights of the Old Republic*. As we and everyone else has said numerous times, BioWare's awesome *Star Wars* RPG—CGW's 2003 Game of the Year—told the best *Star Wars* story since the original movie trilogy. So here's how we'd cast the *KOTOR* movie. Do you have better ideas? Let us know!



**Kate Beckinsale as Bastila Shan**  
Bastila is an incredibly gifted but  
impulsive and brash Jedi who exudes  
strength and authority with a bit of a  
dark-edge. British actress Kate  
Beckinsale, who almost redeemed  
*Underworld* as a hot vampire warrior,  
definitely gets the nod here.



Kurt Russell  
as Captain Rous  
Oido

**guy, and  
dangerous Ord  
is the one in  
*KOTOR*—he's a  
lot of blood  
on his  
hands. So  
this ro-  
gues to Kurt  
Russell, who will  
forever own us.  
thanks to his  
godlike turn as  
**Snake Plissken**  
**in *Escape From***  
***New York*.****



**Larry David  
as Jolee Bindo**



SIX  
PICKS



**Madden NFL 2005**  
The best  
videogame fran-  
chise ever just  
keeps on getting  
better, and lately, I can't get enough  
of the nearly gold Version of *Madden  
NFL 2005*. What more can I say?



**Call of Duty**  
I loved this game when it first came out, and I still can't get enough of it. While the multiplayer leaves a lot to be desired (it feels like a sniperfest), the single-player experience is still compelling.



**Ghost Recon**  
I know, Ghost Recon 2 is about to come out, but until then... I'll make do with the original. This game is infinitely replayable. Think you're a badass? Try completing the entire game solo.

# Rewind

# 100

What should you play today? Names in red indicate Editors' Choice games

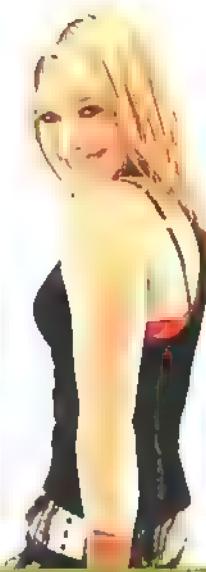
GAME	ISSUE	RATING
Across the Dnepr	04/04	★★★
Ace Combat: Sins of a Solar Empire	03/04	★★★★★
Space Station 13 v2.0		
Armed and Dangerous	03/04	★★★★
Aura: Fate of the Ages	10/04	★★★
Battle Engine Aquila	04/04	★★★★
Battlefield Vietnam	06/04	★★★★★
Beleager	09/04	★★★★★
Beyond Divinity	08/04	★★★★★
Beyond Good & Evil	03/04	★★★★★
Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	04/04	★★★★
Blade and Sword	01/04	★★
Breed	07/04	★★★
Chaos Legion	08/04	★★
City of Heroes	08/04	★★★★
Civilization III: Conquests	04/04	★★★★
Combat Mission: Afrika Korps	04/04	★★★
Conspiracies	05/04	★★
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	03/04	★★★★
Crusader Kings	08/04	★★★
Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm	08/04	★★★★
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Dark Motives	08/04	★★
Dead Man's Hand	08/04	★★
Dead to Rights	04/04	★★
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Corps	07/04	★★★
Doom Ex 2: Invisible War	03/04	★★★★



**Steve Buscemi as HK-47**  
HK-47 is a thin, wiry badass of a droid, a take-no-guff robot with attitude. For us, there's only one choice here: *Star Wars*. The *Reservoir Dogs/Sopranos/Fargo* star, who could call humans "meatbags" with the appropriate snarl and disgust.



**Hilary Duff as Mission Vao**  
+ a perky, quick-witted Twilek girl—Street-smart and charming in that pappily way, Hilary Duff has the kind of spunk that this sci-fi movie needs.



**Vin Diesel as Darth Malak**  
Dark Malak is a bald, brutal, arrogant former Jedi, now a Sith lord intent on conquering the galaxy. Vin Diesel gets the nod here, not just for the perfect resemblance, but also because he has the kind of geek cred that a movie with Larry David is going to need.



**Ron Perlman as Zaalbar**



**Jennifer Garner as Juhani**  
Hot-tempered and passionate, Juhani battles Sith bad guys as well as her own inner demons. Jennifer Garner brings the same kind of fiery angst to her role on *Alias*, but she gets this role only if we can get her to wear leather. Hey, it's our movie. We make the rules.



## RewInd100

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
	06/04	★★★★
Doom 3	10/04	★★★★
Far Cry	06/04	★★★★
FireStarter	06/04	★★
Gangland	06/04	★★
Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	10/04	★★★★
Hitman: Contracts	08/04	★★
Horizon: Empire of Isaria	05/04	★★
Jack the Ripper	05/04	★★
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	09/04	★★★★
Judge Dredd: Dredd Versus Death	07/04	★★★★
Korean Forgotten Conflict	04/04	★★
Kuma!War	09/04	★
Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	08/04	★★★★
Lock On: Modern Air Combat	03/04	★★★★
Lords of EverQuest	05/04	★★
Lords of the Realm III	01/04	★
Magic: The Gathering—Battlegrounds	04/04	★★
Manhunt	07/04	★★
	10/04	★★★★
MVP Baseball 2004	06/04	★★★★
Mysterious Journey II	03/04	★★
NASCAR Thunder 2004	03/04	★★★★
NBA Live 2004	03/04	★★★★
Need for Speed Underground	03/04	★★★★
Nemesis of the Roman Empire	07/04	★★
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	03/04	★★★★

## IMPLEMENTS OF DESTRUCTION

A few of our favorite ways to blow the competition away

There are a lot of fancy-schmancy weapons in the various first-person shooters we're all obsessed with, but have you ever taken the time to think about how well these armaments jive with their real-world versions?

**As Seen In:** UT2004, Halo, Quake III: Arena  
**Profile:** Pose your arm around your shoulder.  
**The Real Deal:** Have you ever hit someone with a crowbar? Well, don't answer that—let us get out of range first. Cops are more fearful of melee weapons such as crowbars and knives than they are of guns—with good reason. Crowbars tend to hurt when someone's beating the hell out of you with one.

**As Seen In:** UT2004, Quake III: Arena  
**Profile:** Walnut stock, cobalt blue steel, and a hair trigger.  
**The Real Deal:** Shotguns (or what the Ubergeeks among us refer to as "boomsticks") are good for one thing: blowing big holes in people, especially zombies. Nothing quite like making an undead head explode. We're not sure how accurate that is in real life, but we do know that these things are pretty sweet.

**As Seen In:** UT2004, Halo  
**Profile:** Fully automatic.  
**The Real Deal:** These things shoot through bullets like nobody's business, but they get the job done. You suck as much as Ryan who can fire 50 bullets at someone without so much as scratching them, only to be nailed by a single shot to the head five seconds later. Which brings us to our next topic.

**As Seen In:** UT2004, Halo  
**Profile:** Every cheap bastard's favorite toy. The Real Deal: What's good on paper, but when you've got stocky moronoids, year-olds with sniper rifles on a map camping out in the shadows and waiting for perfect head-shot opportunities, it's just...well, kind of lame. Something tells us real marksmen are a lot more impressive. And a lot less��able.

**As Seen In:** UT2004, Halo  
**Profile:** It shoots ROCKETS. What else is there to say?  
**The Real Deal:** This gun doesn't look like it would be easy—or even possible—to carry those things around and still run at a decent clip. Sometimes, they're just plain unrealistic—some of those critters in Far Cry take seven or eight rockets to kill. In reality, just one rocket will turn anything into a delicious red paste.

**As Seen In:** UT2004, Halo  
**Profile:** Awesome alien technology with no basis in reality whatsoever. The Real Deal: We're not sure how these would stack up against other big guns in the real world, but chances are, if you're shooting plasma bolts, people should probably be running away from you. Same goes for lasers, lightning guns, radiation beams, RPGs, and other kick-ass stuff that doesn't exist yet. Our damn scientists are lazy, working on cool diseases instead of powerful weapons.

## LIST MANIA!

Four publishers to keep an eye on

EA wasn't always the EA we know today. Like everybody else, they started somewhere. These four publishers may not have the same level of name recognition, but they're worth your time and money every bit as much as the big guns are.



### 1. NovaLogic

[www.novalogic.com](http://www.novalogic.com)

NovaLogic is quickly developing a reputation for high-quality tactical action games. It recently made a big splash with *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising*, and its recent *Black Hawk Down* efforts (notably, *Team Sabre*) have been pretty solid as well.



### 2. Tri Synergy

[www.trisynergy.com](http://www.trisynergy.com)

You may not know the name, but that's not surprising since Tri-Synergy takes a low-key approach to publishing in an effort to yield most of the limelight to its games' developers. The company has been responsible for such titles as *The Longest Journey* and *Port Royale*.



### 3. Bethesda Softworks

[www.bethsoft.com](http://www.bethsoft.com)

Best known for its *Elder Scrolls* franchise of role-playing games, Bethesda also holds the license for the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired *Call of Cthulhu* series, and the company recently announced that it is developing and publishing the eagerly anticipated *Fallout 3*.



### 4. Shrapnel Games

[www.shrapnelgames.com](http://www.shrapnelgames.com)

Shrapnel Games is the kind of publisher that appeals to a certain type of gamer—that is, the hardest of the hardcore strategy-game fans. Fans like freelancer Bruce Geryk, who wrote an entire tutorial for *Dominions II* because it is so damned complicated.

## REWIND 100

GAME	ISSUE	RATING
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	04/04	★★
Paintkiller	07/04	★★★★
Pax Romana	03/04	★★★
Perimeter	09/04	★★
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	03/04	★★★★
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	06/04	★★★★
Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	02/04	★★★★
Sacred	07/04	★★★★
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	03/04	★★★
Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos	04/04	★★
Shrek 2	09/04	★★★★
Silent Hill 3	03/04	★†
Silent Storm	04/04	★★★★
Singlets: Flirt Up Your Life	01/04	*



© Soldier: Secret Wars	10/04	★‡
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	06/04	★★★★
Squad Assault: Western Front	03/04	★★
Star Chamber	05/04	★★★★
Syberia II	05/04	★★★★
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	05/04	★‡
Terminator 3: War of the Machines	04/04	★‡



© The Suffering	04/04	★★
Thief: Deadly Shadows	09/04	★★★★
Title Bout Championship Boxing	05/04	★★★★

## CGW GAME DESIGN 101



Castles, kings, fiefdoms, might not be Wimbledon, but life beats jousting

Illustration by Matt Barton

**Rewind 100**

GAME ISSUE RATING

**HIGH SCORE**

Our favorite things at 1UP.com

Hey guys! Check out our ever-expanding gaming community at 1UP.com, where you can create a journal, track your game collection, build a network of friends, and chat with other CGW readers. You can even join our club at [cgwfans.1UP.com/club](http://cgwfans.1UP.com/club) and let us know which clubs, blogs, and goofy pictures you'd like to see on this page each month.

**FEATURED BLOG**

**Zoe Flower**  
"Zoeflower"



Rainbow Locket  
Current Points: 12765  
Total Points: 12705

**Zoe Flower**  
<http://zoeflower.1UP.com/>

Zoe Flower is an accomplished writer, producer, W.B. correspondent, and television personality, as well as a frequent contributor to our sister magazine, *OPN*. She's also got one of the most entertaining blogs on 1UP.com.

**CLUB OF THE MONTH**

**Unicorn Club** <http://unicorn.1UP.com/club/>

Club founder and *XBN* managing editor Cindy Lum describes it best: "Um, we...talk about unicorns, and post pictures of unicorns, and write about our unicorn sightings. You should join!"



**STUPID PICTURE OF THE MONTH**

This is what's currently listed as "ROBERT COFFEY'S DESKTOP PICTURE" and that's all we've got to say about that.

"So now that I'm a member of the CGW Fans United club, when can I get my CGW: FU! T-shirt?"

—ARCADIAN DEL SOL

**WHAT'S UP WITH 1UP?**

A few words from 1UP.com's editor-in-chief

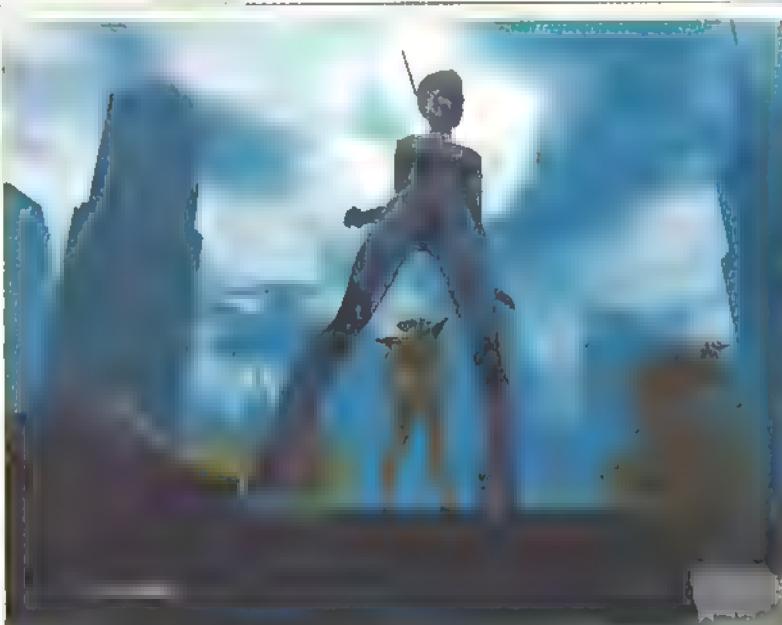
By now, many of you have started your own pages on 1UP, and if you have, there's a good likelihood I've run across them. You see, I try to make it a habit to explore the many user pages of 1UP for at least a good hour or so each day—not only to get a sense of what people like or dislike about the site, but also to see what sorts of gamers we're attracting. I've actually been pretty amazed so far, for the most part. I'll come across 18-to-24-year-old gamers who are into *Battlefield*, *Final Fantasy XI*, *Family Guy*, and *The Simpsons*. No big surprise there. But then there are those users who totally catch me off guard: For example, there's Rayvil Hirandani ([fowlie.1UP.com/](http://fowlie.1UP.com/)) from Hong Kong, who actually took the time to document a whole series of virtual soccer games on his blog, following his Liverpool FC team in *Winning Eleven*. Or Raychul Moore ([raychul.1UP.com/](http://raychul.1UP.com/)), a hot 25-year-old model who loves using her page to chat about games, she's beta testing, and to show off her sexy pics. And then there's Bev McClain ([granniegamer.1UP.com/](http://granniegamer.1UP.com/)), a 59-year-old CGW reader who is hardcore about games as you or I. Who knew? Certainly not me—but it's folks like these that have really made the new 1UP that much more fun to visit. —Sam Kennedy <http://capnsmak.1UP.com/>



# Sound Off

CGW's readers speak up

Think you're clever? Got some good game suggestions? Just want to share your two cents? Give us a holler, and you just might show up in the pages of a future Sound Off.



## CAPTION CONTEST

Do our captions suck? Think you can come up with something wittier? Email your caption for this City of Heroes screenshot to cwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject "November Caption Contest," and you just might win a brand new iMac G4!

## ROLL OF THE MONTH

They're both great:



ATI:  
40%

Nvidia:  
**40%**

IN VISION OF ATI

## DESERT ISLAND GAMES

**E** You're stranded on a desert island with only five PC games...which ones? E-mail us at [cwletters@ziffdavis.com](mailto:cwletters@ziffdavis.com) with the subject "Desert Island Games" and let us know which games you'd choose and why.

**Ultima Online (pre-Renaissance expansion):** UO was one of those games that made me shun the outside world. I could play this forever.



**SimCity 4:** Only thing better than living in civilization? Building your own.



**Final Fantasy XI:** My current MMO obsession. With a new patch coming out and another one on the way, this game could keep a person busy for quite a long time.



**Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic:** This game can be played over and over again—there's just so much to do in it.



**Tetris:** A minute to learn, a lifetime to master.

Ryan Higgins  
Sunnyvale, CA

# Tom vs. Bruce

Two gamers enter, one gamer wins.

## The Political Machine

**B**ruce's strategy: The optimal strategy is to build a cheese candidate with maxed-out stamina, experience, and fundraising. But Tom wanted to roleplay, so we agreed to limit those stats. I'm not going to kid myself: Regardless of who wins, I don't expect to last 10 minutes past the closing of the polls. Like his hero Joseph Stalin, Tom is already cranking up the boxcars that will be sending political dissidents to Alaska. My job is not so much to win or lose, but to make a statement to the world, which the U.N. will ignore because I haven't paid them any money. At least I was able to successfully reject Tom's call for U.N. election monitors.

**Tom's strategy:** Having actually played a reporter on *The West Wing*, I think I have an enormous advantage in the media, so I boost my media bias to 10. This is helpful for swaying independents who might think "Hey, I've seen that guy in the White House before! He must belong there!" Conversely, being a dorky white guy, I lower my minority appeal to 3. Unfortunately, Bruce is from Michigan, a state with 17 electoral votes, while I'm from Arkansas, a state with only six electoral votes. But if Clinton can do it, so can I.

**Bruce, week 1:** My strategy will be to use

the war on terror as a key issue. This means an early grab for the National Foreign Policy Committee endorsement, which requires sitting in one place for a while to gather the necessary political capital.

**Tom, week 3:** In the first weeks of the campaign, I spend most of my starting money building big, fancy headquarters in lots of states that I would love dearly even if they didn't have lots of electoral college votes. Honest!

**Bruce at home in the Great Lakes state.**

job will be to keep these issues in the public eye.

**Tom, week 7:** Just as it's important to get my awareness levels up, it's also important to squelch Bruce's lies about how he'd make a better president than me. To this end, I gather enough political capital to hire a squad of three intimidators, who do less-than-savory things to lower your opponent's awareness in a state. Imagine a group of thugs coming to your door to persuade you that you've never heard of Bruce Geryk. That's what these guys do.

**Bruce, week 8:** Tom's going to do his intimidator trick again. Time to shift some operatives around to preempt them.



Players

© Tom

Ritice

This month, Tom and Bruce vie for the U.S. presidency, creating themselves as candidates in Stardock's *The Political Machine*. Heaven help.



**Build these babies early to spread the word and bring in the Benjamins.**

**Tom, week 12:** I'm all for the war on terror—as are most Americans, since the issue is ranked as No. 1 among voters, 83 percent of whom think Bruce would manage it better. But I need to remind everyone that there are other important things going on. Like, say...let's take a look at the national polls...crime. So my first TV ad explains that I favor fighting crime which catapults it to the No. 1 spot I fly to Pennsylvania—whose 21 electoral votes are a very shiny bauble for a presidential candidate—to give a speech on the subject. Now two out of three voters think that I'm a better crime fighter than Bruce Goryk. I take to wearing a cape at my campaign appearances.

**Bruce, week 13:** Tom has brought his own war hero to Virginia to match the one already have there. Unfortunately for him, mine served honorably in WWII and Korea, while his was part of Gen. Vlasov's army. Due to the game not taking into account what happens if your war hero is also a war criminal, our heroes cancel each other out.

A screenshot of a website section titled "WIN ENDORSEMENTS". The main feature is a large, semi-transparent image of a female symbol (♀) centered over a dark background. Below this are several horizontal boxes, each containing a small portrait of a person and their name: "SARAH HUCKLEBERRY FINNEGAN", "DANIELLE BROWN", "JULIA GIBSON", "KATHY KIRK", "ROBIN KELLY", "JULIA LEE", "JULIA LEE", "JULIA LEE", and "JULIA LEE". Each box also includes a small graphic, such as a checkmark or a star.

Special interests come calling!

**Tom, week 14:** You're going to be hearing a lot more of this stuff about how I'm a Soviet, which is evidence that Bruce sees no difference between a Democrat and a Communist. I don't know how he smooth

talked the ladies at the National Association of Women into endorsing him but I need to immediately counter it with an endorsement of my own. So I hang out for two turns, gathering the political capital to bring the National Union Action Network to my side. This pro-labor stance helps me in all those Great Lakes states where Bruce's Republican propaganda is giving me a lead among the blue-collar set.

**Bruce, week 17:** Now I get the ACLU endorsement. This helps me on freedom of speech but hurts me on prayer in schools, which seems completely contradictory. But whatever, it's another endorsement Tom can't get. Not that there would be any freedom of speech in Tom Chick's opinions anyway.

**Tom, week 18:** I have a disastrous appearance on the O'Malley Scenario. In coming out against reparations to slaves and in favor of women in the military, I somehow manage to alienate independent voters. What's up w th those peop e? Didn't they see me on *The West Wing*?

**Bruce, week 20:** Tom's O'Malley Scenario appearance is causing major problems for him. In it, he answers a question wholly in Russian, and at another point, one of his advisors is seen threatening the show's host with a Kalashnikov. Because this is simply how Tom's political heroes do business, he can't figure out why he alienated anyone. It doesn't matter, though—anyone he alienated will eventually be working in Alaska's labor camps.



**Tom, week 22:** I've recently grabbed the National Gun Owners Association and Christian Confederation endorsements, which is kind of backward. Bruce and I are straying from our political bases, but it's Bruce's fault for grabbing the endorsements I wanted! For my VP, I choose Edwards to shore up support in North Carolina. While I'm fighting for Texas and Florida, I send him off to campaign in the Midwest, partly because I need more support there, but also because he creeps me out. He looks like Sam Neill in *Omen III*.

**Bruce, week 22:** choose Dick Cheney as my running mate. I'm not abandoning him just because some wackos irrationally hate Haiburton. He'll start spreading awareness in Wyoming and the adjacent

states, which players tend to ignore until late because they are worth so few electoral votes

**Tom, week 24:** I hire a smear merchant to spread rumors about Bruce wearing spandex pants and hating puppies. Meanwhile I'm using Texas as the home base for my TV ad campaign, where I've saved up almost \$2 million while waiting to see what issues Bruce wants to push. He's clearly chosen the war on terror and the lack of jobs as his talking points; they're ranked No. 1 and No. 2 among voters and he's got a healthy lead in both issues. Time to fix that with four TV ads in one turn: I favor the war on terror, Bruce opposes the war on terror, I favor more jobs, Bruce opposes more jobs. Bam, bam, bam! The next turn, I pass him on his own talking points and shoot up in the polls, with 434 projected electoral votes to Bruce's 104. But I need to keep my lead without ignoring the other issues. For instance, he's passed me on "fighting crime," which is still lingering in the top five issues. I hand over my cane.



#### • Home of the Democratic media machine

**Bruce, week 28:** I get a heckler and put him in Texas, which seems to be Tom's base of operations for everything. Interestingly, Tom's headquarters in that state is based in Moscow, Texas.



When you want to send a webmaster home, this guy is the go-to man.

**Tom, week 29:** With a moneyman I found in Montana I held two consecutive fundraisers in California, which gets me over a half a million dollars. I fly back to Texas to place more ads, but Bruce's heckler is making my ad placement difficult. Since this is a cornerstone of my

strategy, I can't have that annoying little guy here. So I bring in a fixer to make the heckler disappear.

**Bruce, week 30:** Two can play the fixer game. Tom has hired a webmaster in Texas to keep the cost of his ads down and to oversee the conversion of campaign contributions from rubles to dollars. I send my own fixer to gently persuade the webmaster to go back to work making *Doom 3* mods. This should increase Tom's fixed costs significantly and require him to fly in another plane-load of currency from Sheremetev.



© Florida: Can't live with it...can't kill it.

**Tom, week 32:** I can't afford to pay the full price for ad maintenance in Texas, and Bruce can't afford to leave it alone, so we're hiring dueling sets of replacement webmasters taken out by fixers. I can do this as long as he wants, because I'm ahead in Florida and Pennsylvania by two points. California and Texas are dead heats, but I should be OK on the West Coast if I can offset Bruce's lying pro-environment ads.

**Bruce, week 33:** The essential late-game strategy is to recruit political operatives to tip the balance in the toss-up states, so I finally give up trying to sabotage Tom's



webmasters. Instead, I start spending political capital on spin doctors and smear merchants—since they can be moved around for free, I micromanage the situation for optimal placement.

**Tom, week 34:** As evidence of the occasional incompetence that mars any political campaign, I build a campaign headquarters in North Carolina. But somehow, a headquarters is accidentally built in Oklahoma. I immediately fire my campaign manager. Seeing as how I am both

the campaign manager and the candidate, I immediately rehire myself.



**© Bruce, week 34:** I go for the Florida TV double whammy on Social Security: I love it, Tom hates it. The problem with negative ads is that they work more slowly than positive ads, so they're best placed early on. Right now, though, with the game so close, I need to do whatever I can to knock Tom down in Florida.

**Tom, week 35:** Nationally, I'm leading as the candidate most in favor of the environment. But Bruce has misinformed California so egregiously that they support him as the pro-environment candidate. It's sheer lunacy. He doesn't even drive a hybrid!

**Bruce, week 36:** Tom just gave a speech in California about the importance of the environment, which ends up helping me since I've advertised so effectively. That's 55 electoral votes closer to being mine. With so much of the Midwest also on my side, it's going to be close.

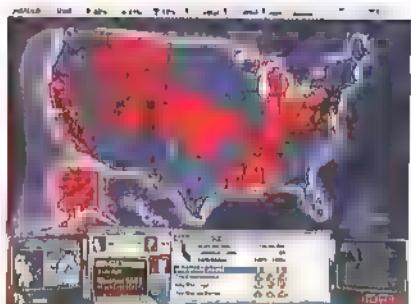


**© Tom, week 38:** I just won a lot of support on the O'Malley Scenario by taking on Bruce's nonsense about the liberal media and Hollywood political activists. But I'm out of money, and my advertising maintenance is eating up all of my income. A spin doctor in California gives me a four-point lead.

**Bruce, week 40:** Tom's smear merchant in Florida knocks me down to 39 percent. He has 41 percent.

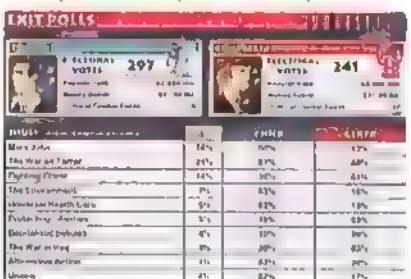
**Tom, week 41:** I place a last-minute newspaper ad in Pennsylvania saying that Bruce wants to outsource everyone's jobs. Then I settle in to watch the returns.

**This just in:** Tom Chick has narrowly defeated Bruce Geryk in the presidential



election, winning 297 electoral votes to Geryk's 241. In the popular vote, Chick led with 52,444,000 votes to Geryk's 48,899,000 votes. Geryk's campaign spent \$21.99 million to Chick's \$17.66 million, but Chick was the clear leader in gathering political favors, hiring operatives, and winning endorsements, using 76 points of political capital to Geryk's 42.

Among the results, Chick carried Texas in a landslide, while Geryk eked out a surprise win in California by three percentage points. Chick won Florida 56 percent to 43 percent, but Geryk won the bitter fighting in Pennsylvania at 57 percent to 42 percent.



Exit polls showed voters' top issues were, in order of importance, the war on terror (56 percent of voters favored Chick), more jobs (51 percent favored Chick), fighting crime (61 percent favored Geryk), and the environment (83 percent favored Chick).

**Bruce's concession speech:** Tom Chick is a Communist. There may not be another Tom vs. Bruce article once Tom's terror machine gets rolling.

**Tom's victory speech:** Thank you, America, for not believing Bruce Geryk. I will now appoint my three intimidators to cabinet-level positions. California, since you have betrayed me, I present you as a gift to Mexico. Pennsylvania also betrayed me, so effective immediately, its new name will be The State of Dingleberry. Finally, since Bruce has to get up early to go to work in the morning, our victory party will be held at his house. Thank you and good night. ☺

### The Wall Street Times

Chick Wins!!!

Chick comes out on top in the race for the White House!

Coming Next Month...

DECEMBER 2004 ON SALE OCTOBER 19

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# Shocking Behavior

Next month, we kiss bug zappers

"A" rghhh!" he cries out, his face contorted with pain, his hand spastically cramping. He grimaces again and lurches backward, the pliable hand clutching his silvery tormentor jerking above his head. "Aaarrggghh!" he cries out yet again, his voice more strangled than before.

Copy editor Greg Ford is a nice guy, and I'm systematically electrocuting him. Over and over again.

Now, in spite of what you're undoubtedly thinking, I have not snapped some jumper cables on to poor electrified Greg's swanky modes. Sad Mister Ford is getting fried voluntarily because barely codified pain infliction is what we at CGW call "play." Greg is in fact playing the latest thing in electric (not electronic) gaming—a little gizmo called Lightning Reaction, which I got from www.baronbob.com. Yeah, it's been a pretty slow few months for games around here.

The Lightning Reaction is a kinda chintzy little deal that looks like a bad original *Star Trek* prop. It's a silver-colored plastic pain machine with four handles, each with a red thumb trigger, connected with red wire to a central base holding three AAA batteries that pack a surprising amount of punch. A large button in the middle of the central unit flashes red while a banshee wail—the same whining up-and-down sound that crippled crew members of the *Enterprise* at least every third episode—screches, and then the button goes green. The last person to buzz in is treated to an electric shock that rockets up the arm and hammers the elbow. It is, at best, simply painful. At worst, it is traumatic—years of painstakingly re-establishing spousal trust after the "pull my finger" episode of '94 have been trashed, and my wife has joined the neighbors in shrieking at the mere sight of me.

So, is the Lightning Reaction a game? Well, if Russian roulette is a game, then sure. Four people can square off, and there's obviously one utterly and completely profound loser about to be served up every time that center button is pressed to launch another round. It sounds like a toy, but according to the box it came in, it isn't. "Not intended to be used as a toy!" trumpets the box over and over again. "May interfere with electrical devices such as pacemakers!" Hmm, sounds as ominous as the burrito-heating microwave at 7-11. "Do not use if you suffer from epilepsy or any similar or related ill-



**Copy editor Greg Ford is a nice guy, and I'm systematically electrocuting him.**

nesses!" Apparently, whatever it may or may not be in the minds of its creators, it is, at the very least, a lawsuit just waiting to happen. "Keep out of reach of children!" screams the box. "THIS IS NOT A TOY, KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN," it proclaims, the subtext clearly being "FOR SURELY THEY SHALL BE SLAIN!"

I carried the Lightning Reaction around for weeks, disingenuously tempting innocents into trying it in an effort to discover one thing: If it isn't meant for kids, epileptics, or Dick Cheney, just who is it meant for? And if it isn't a toy, then what is it? I can't say for sure. It is an excellent taxonomy tool, easily and conveniently sorting people into one of two categories: 'fraidy cats and idiots. A good 25 percent of the people working on this floor—including alleged gamers toiling on sister mags like *Xbox Nation*—refused even to try it. People who endured tattoos couldn't muster up the courage for just one round of the Potential Voluntary 15 Seconds of Self-Electrocution Demigame. Others couldn't get enough and did it repeatedly. Even after they lost. A number of times. The most die-hard self-zappers were

found in our copy editing crew, which, upon further reflection, really makes a kind of sense: Correcting every word written in every Ziff Davis gaming magazine all day has left their arms entirely insensitive, anaesthetized by the ravages of advanced carpal tunnel syndrome. Either that, or years of reading the gibberish printed in these pages makes the ritualistic application of torture pleasurable in comparison. All I know for sure is that the seemingly mild-mannered Susie Ochs could absorb a lightning strike and laugh while her eyebrows smoldered.

Ultimately, the antijoy buzzer may just be what the box alleges—"a novelty item." Because once the novelty wore off, pretty much no one wanted anything to do with it. It's not much of a game, though you could certainly construct some games around it and they'd all probably be better than the last *Tomb Raider*. Thankfully, we're finally into the good part of the year, *Doom 3* and *The Sims 2* are out, and we no longer have to resort to something on par with recreational paper cuts for entertainment. Thank God. **Robert Coffey**  
robert\_coffey@ziffdavis.com

KONTROLLIERT 14. März 1944

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## INGAME SCREENSHOT



COMING SOON!

# CODENAME: **PANZERS** PHASE ONE

WWII REAL-TIME  
STRATEGY



TEEN



Blood  
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING

[www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org)

WWII experiences its rebirth in 2004 with the appearance of the colossal game Codename: Panzers. Breathtaking graphics, fantastic mission design, a complete immersion in the events via amazing scenarios and intense multiplayer modes. Like never before Codename: Panzers will give you the feeling of being at the landing at Omaha Beach, the defense of Stalingrad, the conquering of Berlin or the battle in the Ardennes.

[WWW.PANZERS.COM](http://WWW.PANZERS.COM)

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**Stormregion**



14.15. 1. 8, GBT 224

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# JAMDAT SPORTS NFL 2005



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